

Sūrah Sabā'

Introduction to the Fifth Group

With this group begins the fifth group of Qur'ānic *sūrahs* which ends on Sūrah Ḥujurāt. The first thirteen *sūrahs* of this group – Sabā' to Aḥqāf – are Makkan and the last three – Muḥammad, Fath and Ḥujurāt – are Madīnan.

Central Theme of the Fifth Group

Like the previous group, the topics discussed in this group are monotheism, prophethood and the hereafter. These three form the foundation of the message of the Qur'ān. However, the methodology of argumentation and the linguistic style are different. The central theme of the group is to validate monotheism. This validation will seem very prominent in all the *sūrahs* of the group. Other topics are subsumed under this central theme and only as an explanation of its implications.

Central Theme of Sūrah Sabā'

The central theme of this first *sūrah* of the group is to validate monotheism and the hereafter. Both these beliefs themselves are based on gratitude and what it entails. The addressees of the *sūrah* are the affluent Quraysh.

Analysis of the Discourse

In the following paragraphs, the meanings encompassed by the discourse are concisely stated so that the sequence between all the parts of the *sūrah* and its central theme becomes evident.

Verses (1-9): In this introductory part, people are invited to the fact that God alone is worthy of gratitude. This is because whatever the heavens and the earth contain belongs to Him and in the Hereafter too He will reign supreme. His knowledge is all-embracing; hence, neither any deed of a person is concealed from Him nor will anyone be able to help others through their baseless intercession. Those who think that the Hereafter will never come are in deep error. The Hereafter is an incontestable reality and the obvious corollary of God's attributes. Those who have the slightest of knowledge are aware that the concepts of monotheism and Hereafter to which the Qur'ān is calling them are absolute realities. Only the negligent and the indifferent are making fun of them. Their real

ailment is that they have become devoid of the traits of repentance and seeking a lesson. If they had this ability, they would have seen that God can seize them whenever He wants and wherever He wants.

Verses (10-14): In order to warn the affluent Qurasyh, the examples of David (sws) and Solomon (sws) are cited before them: God granted them with all the favours of this world but they never became arrogant and haughty and remained grateful and obedient to Him. They were never lured away by the devils into their obedience; on the contrary, they made the devils follow them. God makes the devils become subservient to those who follow their Lord. However, devils get the better of those who are ungrateful to God and they become the slaves of these devils.

Verses (15-21): The example of the queen of Sheba is cited from which it is evident that nations who after being bestowed with God's favours become arrogant and spread anarchy in the land instead of becoming grateful are punished by God in an exemplary manner. The people of Sabā' fulfilled the prediction of Satan about them. As a result, the Almighty deprived them of all His favours and made them a tale of the ancients.

Verses (22-27): The baseless concepts of polytheism and intercession are refuted and the Prophet (sws) is directed to leave the matter of these Idolaters to God if they want to persist in their stubbornness merely because of arrogant egotism; he has done what was required of him; now the Almighty will decide their fate. He is aware of everything and is about to pass His judgement in every matter.

Verses (28-33): An answer is given to those who were raising the objection that they were not willing to believe in the Qur'ān until they are shown the punishment they are being threatened with.

Verses (34-39): The real reason on account of which the disbelievers were rejecting the Qur'ān is referred to: they regarded themselves to be favoured ones of God because of the affluence and status they possessed in this world. They think that just as they are successful people in this world, in the next one too (if ever it comes) they will be successful. The fact of the matter is that God gives the favours of this world to people to test and try them. It is meant to be seen whether such people become grateful or not. In the Hereafter, God will deal with a person on the basis of his deeds.

Verses (40-43): Among the various deities the Idolaters worshipped were angels; they are warned that on the Day of Judgement these angels will declare their acquittal from them when they will be asked if these Idolaters worshipped them; the angels will reply that they have in fact been worshipping the jinn and they themselves renounce having any relationship with the Idolaters.

Verses (44-54): In this concluding section of the *sūrah*, attention is first directed at the great favour done by God to these people in the form of the Qur'ān. They were the ones who were not conversant with any divine scripture before this. After that they are very affectionately asked to seriously reflect on the matter before they take a decision. Finally, they are threatened that if this time lapses, they will regret forever but they will not be afforded any other opportunity.

Section I: Verses (1-9)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
 الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَهُ الْحَمْدُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ وَهُوَ الْحَكِيمُ
 الْحَبِيرُ (١) يَعْلَمُ مَا يَلْجُ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا يَخْرُجُ مِنْهَا وَمَا يَنْزِلُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَمَا يَعْرُجُ فِيهَا
 وَهُوَ الرَّحِيمُ الْغَفُورُ (٢) وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَا تَأْتِينَا السَّاعَةُ قُلْ بَلَىٰ وَرَبِّي لَتَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ
 عَالِمِ الْغَيْبِ لَا يَعْزُبُ عَنْهُ مِثْقَالُ ذَرَّةٍ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا أَصْغَرُ مِنْ ذَلِكَ
 وَلَا أَكْبَرُ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مُبِينٍ (٣) لِيَجْزِيَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ
 مَغْفِرَةٌ وَرِزْقٌ كَرِيمٌ (٤) وَالَّذِينَ سَعَوْا فِي آيَاتِنَا مُعَاجِزِينَ أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مِّن رَّجْزٍ أَلِيمٍ
 (٥) وَيَرَى الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ الَّذِي أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكَ مِنْ رَبِّكَ هُوَ الْحَقُّ وَيَهْدِي إِلَى صِرَاطِ
 الْعَزِيزِ الْحَمِيدِ (٦) وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا هَلْ نَدُلُّكُمْ عَلَىٰ رَجُلٍ يُنْبِئُكُمْ إِذَا مُرِّقْتُمْ كُلَّ
 مُمَرِّقٍ إِنَّكُمْ لَفِي خَلْقٍ جَدِيدٍ (٧) أَفَتَرَىٰ عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَمْ بِهِ جِنَّةٌ بَلَىٰ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ
 بِالْآخِرَةِ فِي الْعَذَابِ وَالضَّلَالِ الْبَعِيدِ (٨) أَفَلَمْ يَرَوْا إِلَىٰ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ مِّنَ
 السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ إِنَّ نَاشِئُ خُسْفٍ بِهِمُ الْأَرْضَ أَوْ نُسْقِطُ عَلَيْهِمْ كِسْفًا مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ إِنَّ فِي
 ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّكُلِّ عَبْدٍ مُّنِيبٍ (٩)

God, to whom belongs everything between the heavens and the earth, is alone worthy of gratitude! And He alone will be shown gratitude to in the world to come. And He is the real Wise One, the All-Knowing. He has knowledge of all that goes into the earth and all that comes out from it and all that descends from the sky and all that ascends to it. And He alone is the Forgiving One, the Merciful. (1-2)

And the disbelievers declare: "The Day of Judgment will never come to us." Say: "Yes! By the Lord Who knows all that is unknown, it will surely come to you! Nothing at all is hidden from Him neither in the

heavens nor in the earth nor anything smaller or greater than it but is recorded in a clear book. So that He may reward those who professed faith and did righteous deeds; it is they who shall be granted forgiveness and a noble provision. And those who fervently strive to defeat Our revelations shall have a special share in the painful torment.” (3-5)

And those endowed with knowledge regard what has been revealed to you from your Lord as the very truth and it leads to the path of the Almighty, the Praiseworthy One. (6)

And those who have disbelieved say: “Shall we show you a man who claims that when you will be reduced to bits you will be raised in a new creation? Has he invented a lie about God, or is he mad?” In fact, those who deny the life to come are doomed and inflicted with deep error. (7-8)

Have they not seen the heavens and the earth before and behind them? If We want, We can make the earth to cave in with them or let fragments of the sky fall upon them. Indeed, there is a sign in this for every penitent person. (9)

Explanation

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَهُ الْحَمْدُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ وَهُوَ الْحَكِيمُ
الْخَبِيرُ^(١)

I have alluded to earlier that the foundation of this *sūrah* rests on the pillar of gratitude and what it entails. In the exegesis of Sūrah Fātiḥah, it has already been explained that it is on gratitude that monotheism and the edifice of the whole religion stands. Thanking someone who blesses us with favours is explicitly found in human nature. A person is grateful to all those who do a good term to him. A person who does not express gratitude to another for such favours is a wretched and despicable human being. It is on this premise that the question arises as to who has created all these favours and blessings found between the heavens and the skies? Man is benefitting from them every instant and his own survival depends on them. Where have the sun, the moon, the clouds, the winds, the stars and the heavenly bodies come from? Obviously, the correct answer to all these questions is that all these things have been created by God and are subservient to His laws. It has been indicated in previous *sūrahs* that this was the very answer which even the most ardent opponents of the Qur’ān would give. In the verse under discussion, the Qur’ān has sounded a reminder of this obvious reality that the very God Who is the creator and

1. God, to whom belongs everything between the heavens and the earth, is alone worthy of gratitude! And He alone will be shown gratitude to in the world to come. And He is the real Wise One, the All-Knowing.

master of everything in the heavens and the earth is alone worthy of gratitude by all His creatures who are benefitting from all these objects created by Him. The essential requirement of this gratitude is that everyone should worship and obey Him and associate no one in worshipping and obeying Him. This is because no other being has any role in the creation or governance of these objects. If man benefits from others, then this is only through a means and middle agency. Hence if man has any obligation towards these benefits then this is subservient to his obligation to God and cannot equal or supersede this obligation to God.

While the earlier part of the verse mentioned the obligation every human being owes to God in this world, the words *وَلَهُ الْحَمْدُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ* mention the obligation which will become evident in the Hereafter. It is said that his *ḥamd* will take place in the Hereafter as well. As a result, many points become clear:

Firstly, the essential consequence of the elaborate providence found in this world is that the Hereafter manifests itself. In the absence of it, this providence is totally meaningless and purposeless. This has been explained at a number of instances in this exegesis; hence I will content myself to these brief words here.

Secondly, this is a reference to the declaration of gratitude sung by the believers in the Hereafter when they see all the realities with their eyes and also witness the fulfillment of all promises of God. The words in Sūrah Yūnus are: *وَأَخِرٌ دَعْوَاهُمْ أَنِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ (١٠: ١٠)* (And their last cry will be: "Only God, Lord of the worlds, is in fact worthy of gratitude, (10:10))."

Thirdly, these words are a total negation of intercession and deities. All deities and their intercession on whose basis the Idolaters had no fear of Hereafter will be rendered baseless. None of them will be of any benefit to them. On that day, the Idolaters will curse their deities and the deities will renounce these worshippers of theirs. Every one will be brought before the One God. He will announce His decision and every one will become aware that only God, Lord of the worlds, is worthy of gratitude. In Sūrah Qaṣaṣ, this fact is stated thus: *لَهُ الْحَمْدُ فِي الْأُولَى وَالْآخِرَةِ وَلَهُ الْحُكْمُ* (He alone deserves gratitude in this world and in the Hereafter too He will shown gratitude and in His hands is the judgement of all matters and before Him you will be brought forth, (28:70)).

The words *وَهُوَ الْحَكِيمُ الْحَبِيرُ* substantiate from the attributes of God all the claims stated above. He is the Wise and All-Knowing; hence, it is essential that He bring about a day in which He reward the grateful and punish the ingrates for their attitude. If this does not happen, then this

world is a place of amusement in fact cruel amusement and, God forbid, it shall have to be accepted that its creator is not wise; He is a merry-maker. Yet every bit and part of this universe bears witness that its creator is a wise being. Similarly, a corollary of He being wise is that justice should not be nullified by anyone's intercession because this too will negate His wisdom. Moreover, He is also all-knowing because since He has created everything, it is essential that He also be aware of every move and sojourn of every particle of what He has created. The words in Sūrah Mulk are: (۱۴ : ۶۷) *أَلَا يَعْلَمُ مَنْ خَلَقَ* (Would He not know Who has created? (14:67)). The essential requirement of His all-embracing knowledge is that while deciding a matter He not need information from any other person nor anyone deceive Him by His false intercession.

This also should be kept in mind that all the above has been said in an emphatic way implying that when God is the real Master and Creator, the Wise and Knowledgeable one, then who else can be worthy of gratitude.

يَعْلَمُ مَا يَلِجُ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا يَخْرُجُ مِنْهَا وَمَا يَنْزِلُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَمَا يَعْرُجُ فِيهَا وَهُوَ الرَّحِيمُ الْغَفُورُ²

This is an explanation of the attribute of “the knowledgeable one” mentioned in the previous verse: every particle of this universe is in His knowledge and is aware of the moving and stationery states of all objects. He is aware of the seed sown in the earth and also of the plant that later sprouts. Similarly, the calamities and blessings which descend from the sky are in His information as well as those which ascend in it. In other words, His knowledge embraces the microcosm as well as the macrocosm and He is watching over everything. The minutest of things in His kingdom is not beyond His knowledge; neither is it possible that anything can move in any place in this universe without His permission nor interfere in matters. The reason that the all-embracing nature of God's knowledge is explained is that a big factor that leads to polytheism is this concept of the polytheists that how can what transpires in every nook and corner of this unfathomable universe always remain in God's notice; how can He be aware of every word and deed that emanates from each and every human being; how can He be continuously aware of every sorrow that is afflicted to a person. For this reason, they had divided the various affairs of this universe and allotted a deity to each.

2. He has knowledge of all that goes into the earth and all that comes out from it and all that descends from the sky and all that ascends to it. And He alone is the Forgiving One, the Merciful.

To acquire favour with God, they had invented various mediators and intermediaries. They worshipped the jinn as they thought that they bring news from the heavens. They regarded the angels as deities thinking that they intercede before God. This verse has refuted all these superstitions: God's knowledge embraces everything; hence no one is His associate and partner. He is Himself governing all the affairs of this universe and does not need any help in this regard.

The words **وَهُوَ الرَّحِيمُ الْغَفُورُ** imply that God is not unjust and oppressive so that to make Him happy or shield one self from calamities some intercessors and intermediaries are needed. In fact, He is very Merciful and Forgiving. To acquire His mercy and forgiveness all that is needed is that a person seeks repentance for his sins and makes amends. It should be kept in mind here that one of the common factors which lead to polytheism is the deception of the polytheists that God is a very horrible being. After that, in order to make Him happy they invented various intermediaries according to their own concepts. This part of the verse negates this very notion of theirs.

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَا تَأْتِينَا السَّاعَةُ قُلْ بَلَىٰ وَرَبِّي لَتَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ عَالِمِ الْغَيْبِ لَا يَعْزُبُ عَنْهُ مِثْقَالُ ذَرَّةٍ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا أَصْغَرُ مِنْ ذَلِكَ وَلَا أَكْبَرُ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مُبِينٍ (٣)

The first verse of the *sūrah* had mentioned that God is all wise and all knowledgeable. The second verse stated the all embracing nature of His knowledge. Now this verse says that since all this is so, then an essential requirement of all this is that the Day of Judgement is bound to come; yet the stubborn are not willing to believe in it and arrogantly reject it.

The words **قُلْ بَلَىٰ وَرَبِّي لَتَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ** emphatically convey from the tongue of Muḥammad (sws) a response to this attitude of the rejecters. The statement is given in the form of an oath sworn by him on the Almighty and is of the same intensity as that of the rejecters.

The phrase **عَالِمِ الْغَيْبِ** is a *badal* (permutative) of **رَبِّي**. Ie., by my Lord who is aware of the unknown from whom nothing in the heavens and the earth is hidden; everything is written in a clear register.

The reason that the extent of God's knowledge has been portrayed in this verse is to warn and threaten the rejecters who were obdurately denying the Day of Judgement. They should remember that it will not

3. And the disbelievers declare: "The Day of Judgment will never come to us." Say: "Yes! By the Lord Who knows all that is unknown, it will surely come to you! Nothing at all is hidden from Him neither in the heavens nor in the earth nor anything smaller or greater than it but is recorded in a clear book."

only come but when it comes each person will have to give account of all his deeds, whether big or small. At the same time, a clarification is also afforded: one of the reasons that the rejecters regarded this day to be far-fetched is that they regarded keeping the account of each and every word and deed of a person to be unlikely. In order to remove this misconception of theirs, this all-embracing nature of God's knowledge is mentioned just as it was mentioned earlier in the context of monotheism.

لِيَجْزِيَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ وَرِزْقٌ كَرِيمٌ (٤) وَالَّذِينَ سَعَوْا
فِي آيَاتِنَا مُعَاجِزِينَ أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مِّن رَّجْزٍ أَلِيمٌ (٥)⁴

These verses state the need of the Day of Judgement and why is its arrival necessary: if it does not come, then it would mean that the pious and the wicked are alike in the sight of God – which is self-evidently incorrect. God has not created this world on injustice; hence, it is essential that a day come in which the Almighty reward those who professed faith and did righteous deeds and punish those who tried to defeat the cause of God.

Here it needs to be kept in consideration that the real objective of the Day of Judgement stated here is to reward the believers. The reason is that it is precisely this which is the purpose of bringing about this day. Punishing the wrongdoers is not its purpose; it is only a consequence of that day. The Almighty has created this world to shower His mercy and the Day of Judgement also has the same purpose; however, an essential consequence is that those who do not make themselves worthy of this mercy will make themselves worthy of His wrath.

Two things are mentioned here for the believers: forgiveness and noble sustenance. The implication is that God will forgive the blemishes of those who lead their lives while being imbued faith and doing righteous deeds; the expression “noble sustenance” comprehensively signifies all the blessings and favours which they will receive in Paradise.

The disbelievers are mentioned here by the attribute: الَّذِينَ سَعَوْا فِي آيَاتِنَا مُعَاجِزِينَ. The word معاجزة means to try to outdo one another in defeating one another. The implication is that those who are trying all out to defeat the revelations of God will be punished with a painful torment by Him. The obvious allusion is to the leaders of disbelievers who will be punished in a specific way. This specific punishment is called عَذَابٌ مِّن

4. So that He may reward those who professed faith and did righteous deeds; it is they who shall be granted forgiveness and a noble provision. And those who fervently strive to defeat Our revelations shall have a special share in the painful torment.”

رَجْزٍ أَلِيمٍ. The word رَجْزٌ refers to a punishment that is very horrible.

وَيَرَى الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ الَّذِي أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكَ مِنْ رَبِّكَ هُوَ الْحَقُّ وَيَهْدِي إِلَى صِرَاطٍ الْعَزِيزِ
الْحَمِيدِ (٦)⁵

This is a mention of the people blessed with real knowledge whether they belong to the People of the Book or who preserved the teachings of their prophets and scriptures or to the upright ones whose hearts became radiant with the light of the Qur'ān because of their innate yearning for the truth. The followers of the Ḥanifiyyah among the Arabs too come under this latter category. The verse states that these people regard what is revealed to Muḥammad (sws) as the absolute truth. In others words, these people support the belief in monotheism to which he is inviting them and the belief in life after death he is warning them of and regarding these beliefs to be true. As for those who are arrogantly denying these beliefs on the basis of the alleged deities, they are absolutely wrong. It is stated here to assure Muḥammad (sws) that if some careless and indifferent people are opposing him, he should not be bothered; sufficient it is for his faith that those blessed with knowledge and insight are his supporters. A person should care about sane and sensible people and not about those who are careless and indifferent.

The words وَيَهْدِي إِلَى صِرَاطٍ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَمِيدِ imply that these men of learning openly acknowledge the fact that this book undoubtedly guides people to the path of the powerful and praiseworthy God. In other words, the religions fabricated by others will necessarily lead people to the pit of doom and misguide them; however, this Book leads people to God. Here two attributes of God are mentioned: الْعَزِيزِ and الْحَمِيدِ. The former reflects His respect and power and the latter signifies that He alone is worthy of gratitude both in this world and the next. Both these attributes necessarily entail the belief of monotheism and life after death, as is evident from earlier discussions.

Evident from this also is the fact that in the terminology of the Qur'ān real knowledge is the comprehension of God and of the Hereafter only. If a person does not have this knowledge but at the same time has many other disciplines of knowledge in his mind, then they will become a burden for him and danger for others. The Qur'ān has regarded only those people as men of knowledge who have comprehension of God and

5. And those endowed with knowledge regard what has been revealed to you from your Lord as the very truth and it leads to the path of the Almighty, the Praiseworthy.

of the Hereafter:

إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ غَفُورٌ (٣٥: ٤٨)

Only those among His servants fear God Who have knowledge.
Indeed, God is Dominant and Forgiving. (35:48)

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا هَلْ نَدُلُّكُمْ عَلَى رَجُلٍ يُنْبِئُكُمْ إِذَا مُرِّفْتُمْ كُلٌّ مُمَرِّقٍ إِنَّكُمْ لَفِي خَلْقٍ جَدِيدٍ (٧)٦

After referring to the attitude of the believers in the previous verse, the attitude of those people is depicted in this verse who, being devoid of knowledge, are wandering in the darkness of disbelief. It is stated that these people are making fun of the Prophet (sws) and his message. They call upon people and tell them that they will show them a mad person who posing as a messenger of God claims that after dying and being reduced to dust they will be raised to life again. – In other words, this statement is not even worthy of any refutation.

أَفْتَرَى عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَمْ بِهِ جِنَّةٌ بَلِ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ فِي الْعَذَابِ وَالضَّلَالِ الْبَعِيدِ (٨)٧

This verse furnishes further detail of the fun these people make and also an immediate response from the Almighty.

The words أَفْتَرَى عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَمْ بِهِ جِنَّةٌ state the opinion of these people about Muḥammad (sws). According to them, he is either imputing falsehood to God that He has sent him as a messenger and whatever he is saying it is on behalf of God or he is a person possessed. The implication is that both these features exist in this person. He is an imposter as well as mad.

In the sentence بَلِ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ فِي الْعَذَابِ وَالضَّلَالِ الْبَعِيدِ the Qur'ān has given an immediate reply to the fun made by these arrogant people and what an effective and majestic answer it is.

It is stated that these foolish people have made a very wrong assessment. Error lies neither in the messenger nor in his message; the real problem lies with these people who are not professing belief in the

6. And those who have disbelieved say: "Shall we show you a man who claims that when you will be reduced to bits you will be raised in a new creation?"

7. Has he invented a lie about God, or is he mad?" In fact, those who deny the life to come are doomed and inflicted with deep error.

Hereafter. They are afflicted with punishment and have strayed deep into error. One type of error is that in which a person still has the potential to turn back and reform himself even though he may have done many bad things. However, those who are afflicted with the torment of the Hereafter can never turn back. All doors of hope have closed on them. The fate of such people is stated in present tense instead of the future tense because this fate of theirs is actually concealed in their attitude. In other words, they are caught in it at this very moment because of their arrogance.

أَفَلَمْ يَرَوْا إِلَى مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ إِنَّ دُنَّاءَ تُخَسِّفُ بِهِمُ
الْأَرْضَ أَوْ نُسْقِطُ عَلَيْهِمْ كِسَفًا مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّكُلِّ عَبْدٍ مُّنِيبٍ⁸

What was mentioned in the first verse of this section of verses is taken up again here in the last verse. It had been said in the first verse that whatever is in the heavens and the earth is in the hands of God and hence He alone deserves our gratitude both in this world and in the next. Here it is said that have not these arrogant people reflected on the fact that these heavens which are stretched over them like a roof and this earth which is spread below their feet like a floor and from which they are benefitting – who is holding them together? Obviously this task is beyond them. Had God not held them together, the heavens and the earth instead of giving benefit to them would have become a source for torment for them. The verse goes on to state that whenever God wants, He can have them as well as the earth submerged and have the heavens rain down stones for them instead of His mercy. Nothing of this universe is providing benefit out of its own accord. It is doing so at the behest of God. And nothing is in the direct control of human beings. It is because of God's directive that things are being of use to man. This is such a clear fact that makes it mandatory on man to not show arrogance on any favour and on the contrary become grateful to the Lord Who blessed him with these favours; moreover, instead of making a favour a means of showing disobedience to God and being rebellious to Him, he should use it to earn the pleasure of God and while following His directive.

This very topic is mentioned in Sūrah Fāṭir, the next *sūrah* which occurs as the pair of this *sūrah* in the following words:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُمِصُّكُمُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ أَنْ تَزُولَا وَلَئِنْ زَالَتَا إِنْ أُمْسَكُهُمَا مِنْ أَحَدٍ مِّنْ

8. Have they not seen the heavens and the earth before and behind them? If We want, We can make the earth to cave in with them or let fragments of the sky fall upon them. Indeed, there is a sign in this for every penitent person.

بَعْدِهِ إِنَّهُ كَانَ حَلِيمًا غَفُورًا (٣٥: ٤١)

Undoubtedly, it is God who keeps the heavens and the earth from falling. And should they fall, none can hold them back but Him. Indeed, He is Forbearing and Forgiving. (35: 41)

The words *لَئِنْ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةٌ لِّكُلِّ عَبْدٍ مُّنِيبٍ* imply that if they had reflected on this aspect of the heavens and the earth then they would have found a great argument on what the Qur'ān was inviting them to; however, accessing this argument needs that a person possess the quest for the truth, the ability to learn a lesson from others and an inclined heart. No sign can effect those who do not have these traits.

Section II: Verses (10-21)

In the succeeding verses, two examples are cited. The first of them is that of David (sws) and Solomon (sws) who were given a great kingdom, profound knowledge and wisdom and numerous blessings found in the heavens and the earth. They never became arrogant and rebellious after receiving these favours; in fact, they continued to remain thankful and obedient to God. The reward God gave them of this gratitude was that He continued to increase His favours on them.

The second example is that of the people of Sabā' who lived in and governed a very populated and fertile territory; however, they became arrogant and unruly after receiving it. At last, the Almighty totally routed them through a storm and they became a tale of the ancients.

Both these examples are presented before the affluent and arrogant among the Quraysh. They two have both these options: if they want they can make themselves worthy of God's favours like David (sws) and Solomon (sws) and if they want they can invite His wrath by following the footsteps of the people of Sabā'. At the same time, a reminder exists in these examples that if God's law of reward and punishment comes into play in this world, why do they consider it to be improbable in the next world. Readers may now proceed to study these verses.

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا دَاوُودَ مِنَّا فَضْلًا يَا جِبَالُ أَوِّبِي مَعَهُ وَالطَّيْرَ وَآلَنَّا لَهُ الْحَدِيدَ (١٠) أَنْ اْعْمَلْ سَابِغَاتٍ وَقَدِّرْ فِي السَّرْدِ وَاعْمَلُوا صَالِحًا إِنِّي بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ (١١) وَلَسْلَيْنَا الرِّيحَ غُدُوُّهَا شَهْرٌ وَرَوَاحُهَا شَهْرٌ وَأَسَلْنَا لَهُ عَيْنَ الْقِطْرِ وَمِنَ الْجَبِّ مَنْ يَعْمَلُ بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ بِإِذْنِ

رَبِّهِ وَمَنْ يَزِغْ مِنْهُمْ عَنْ أَمْرِنَا نُذِقْهُ مِنْ عَذَابِ السَّعِيرِ (١٢) يَعْمَلُونَ لَهُ مَا يَشَاءُ مِنْ مَحَارِبَ وَتَمَاثِيلَ وَجِفَانٍ كَالْجَوَابِ وَقُدُورٍ رَاسِيَاتٍ اعْمَلُوا آلَ دَاوُودَ شُكْرًا وَقَلِيلٌ مِّنْ عِبَادِيَ الشَّكُورُ (١٣) فَلَمَّا قَضَيْنَا عَلَيْهِ الْمَوْتَ مَا دَلَّهُمْ عَلَى مَوْتِهِ إِلَّا دَابَّةُ الْأَرْضِ تَأْكُلُ مِنسَأَتَهُ فَلَمَّا خَرَّ تَبَيَّنَتِ الْجِنُّ أَن لَّو كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ الْغَيْبَ مَا لَبِثُوا فِي الْعَذَابِ الْمُهِينِ (١٤) لَقَدْ كَانَ لِسَبَإٍ فِي مَسْكِنِهِمْ آيَةٌ جَنَّتَانِ عَنْ يَمِينٍ وَشِمَالٍ كُلُوا مِن رِّزْقِ رَبِّكُمْ وَاشْكُرُوا لَهُ بَلْدَةٌ طَيِّبَةٌ وَرَبٌّ غَفُورٌ (١٥) فَأَعْرَضُوا فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ سَيْلَ الْعَرِمِ وَبَدَّلْنَاهُمْ بِجَنَّتَيْهِمْ جَنَّتَيْنِ ذَوَاتَى أُكُلٍ خَمْطٍ وَأَثْلٍ وَشَيْءٍ مِّن سِدْرٍ قَلِيلٍ (١٦) ذَلِكَ جَزَيْنَاهُمْ بِمَا كَفَرُوا وَهَلْ نُجَازِي إِلَّا الْكَفُورَ (١٧) وَجَعَلْنَا بَيْنَهُمْ وَبَيْنَ الْقَرَى الَّتِي بَارَكْنَا فِيهَا قُرَى ظَاهِرَةً وَقَدَرْنَا فِيهَا السَّيْرَ سِيرُوا فِيهَا لَيَالِيَ وَأَيَّامًا آمِنِينَ (١٨) فَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا بَاعِدْ بَيْنَ أَسْفَارِنَا وَظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ فَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَحَادِيثَ وَمَرَّقْنَاهُمْ كُلَّ مُمَرِّقٍ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّكُلِّ صَبَّارٍ شَكُورٍ (١٩) وَلَقَدْ صَدَّقَ عَلَيْهِمْ إِبْلِيسُ ظَنَّهُ فَاتَّبَعُوهُ إِلَّا فَرِيقًا مِّنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (٢٠) وَمَا كَانَ لَهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِّن سُلْطَانٍ إِلَّا لِنَعْلَمَ مَنْ يُؤْمِنُ بِالْآخِرَةِ مِمَّنْ هُوَ مِنْهَا فِي شَكٍّ وَرَبُّكَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ حَفِيطٌ (٢١)

And on David We bestowed Our special bounty: "Mountains, join him in his hymns and We gave the same directive to the birds also." And We softened iron for him: "Make loose-fitted coats of mail and secure their links and do righteous deeds all of you. Indeed, I am fully observing whatever you do." (10-11)

And We made the wind subservient to Solomon. He would travel away for a month and return back in a month and We caused a spring of molten brass to flow for him and from among the jinn also made those subservient to him, who would serve him at the behest of his Lord [and for them Our directive would be:] he among them who disobeys Our directives, We will make him taste the torment of Hell. They would make for him whatever he pleased: arches, statues, basins as large as watering-troughs, and stationed cauldrons – "Be grateful! House of David." And few among My servants are grateful. (12-13)

Thus when We had decreed his death none except a worm who would eat away his stick informed them of his death. So when he fell down, only then did the jinn realized that had they knowledge of the unknown, they would not have remained in this humiliating scourge. (14)

And for the natives of Sheba also, there was a great sign in their

dwelling-place: rows of orchards both on their left and on their right. "Benefit from the sustenance of your Lord and be grateful to Him." Luxuriant and fertile land and forgiving is your Lord. Then they disobeyed; so We let loose upon them the waters of the dam and replaced their gardens by two others bearing insipid fruit, tamarisks and a few Lote-trees. Thus did We punish them for their ingratitude; and We punish none but the ungrateful. (15-17)

And between them and the cities that We have blessed, We populated roadside settlements and measured out distances of travel between them. "Travel through them by night and day in safety." Thus they said: "Lord! Distance us from our journeys." And they sinned against their souls; so We made them a tale of the ancients and totally routed them. Indeed, there are signs in it for every steadfast, thankful person. (18-19)

And Satan made his view about them come true. So they followed him except for a group of believers. And he had no power over them. Our only aim was to distinguish those who had conviction in the Hereafter from those who were in doubt about it and Your Lord is watching over everything. (20-21)

Explanation

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا دَاوُودَ مِنَّا فَضْلًا يَا جِبَالُ أَوِِّي مَعَهُ وَالطَّيْرَ وَالنَّارُ لَهُ الْحَمْدُ (١٠)⁹

Details of the blessings of God on the prophets David (sws) and Solomon (sws) have been mentioned earlier in Sūrah Anbiyā' and Sūrah Naml. Here I will confine myself to important points only.

The words *وَالطَّيْرَ أَوِِّي مَعَهُ* are an allusion to the gentle and moving voice of David (sws) bestowed to him by the Almighty. He would sit in the valley and sing hymns of God in a melodious tone that was sublime in nature. His rhymed invocations would be so poignant that trees and stones, beasts and birds – all would be overwhelmed by them and would join him in his chanting.

The real meaning of *تأويب* is *ترجيع* which is to add one's tune into another's, repeat another person's voice and to join another person in chanting. In general, everything of this universe glorifies the Almighty and when it does so it also joins others who glorify God. However, the way the Almighty specially blessed David (sws) a gentle heart and melodious voice, in a similar way He had specially directed the mountains and the birds to join David (sws) when he glorifies the

9. And on David We bestowed Our special bounty: "Mountains, join him in his hymns and We gave the same directive to the birds also." And We softened iron for him:

Almighty and sings His hymns. In Sūrah Anbiyā', the words used are: (وَسَخَّرْنَا مَعَ دَاوُدَ الْجِبَالَ يُسَبِّحْنَ وَالطَّيْرَ (٢١: ٧٩) (And We subjugated the mountains with David (sws) and also the birds, (21:79)).

The words وَأَلَكَّا لَهُ الْحَدِيدَ portray the weaponry of David viz. the Almighty softened iron for him. Details of this have been provided in Sūrah Anbiyā' they became so advanced in melting iron and preparing thin links and buckles that such was the light-weight nature of these mail coats that they seemed to be made of cloth that was easy to wear. At the same time, being made of iron, they would be protective in nature.

أَنْ اَعْمَلْ سَابِغَاتٍ وَقَدِّرْ فِي السَّرْدِ وَاعْمَلُوا صَالِحًا إِنِّي بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ¹⁰ (١١)

The word سَابِغَاتٍ is used for a loose-fitted attire that covers the whole body. Here it is used to qualify loose-fitted mail coats. In the expression وَقَدِّرْ فِي السَّرْدِ, the word سرد refers to the make of something and تقدير means to keep proportion in consideration while making something.

To make an attire from iron which is loose-fitted and its ... are also proportionately spaced out would not have been possible unless the Almighty revealed to David (sws) the science of melting iron. He was the one who originated this technological advancement. With this invention he made a grand contribution to defence weaponry. This increased his military might in relation to his enemies.

Consider next the section of the verse: وَاعْمَلُوا صَالِحًا إِنِّي بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ. While in the previous section of the verse, encouragement is expressed to develop this science and benefit from it, in this section of the verse the moral right of this advancement is delineated: he should not go astray after being bestowed with this blessing and spread anarchy in the land through it; on the contrary, he should keep in mind that God is watching over whatever he is doing. This directive is given by God to David (sws) and all his family and followers. This is repeatedly mentioned in the Psalms and the Proverbs.

No one can deny the development man has made in science neither can anyone refute the benefits of this development as well as the benefits that will accrue in future from them. However, man has forgotten two things.

First, every invention of science owes itself to God's guidance. Second, it is the natural requirement of every favour and capability that they be regarded a trust from God, and while benefiting from them he should remember that the God Who has bestowed these is watching where he uses them. By ignoring both these things, science has become a

10. "Make loose-fitted coats of mail and secure their links and do righteous deeds, all of you. Indeed, I am fully observing whatever you do."

great danger for man. One cannot say when man may commit suicide from a weapon he has invented himself.

وَلَسَلِيمَانَ الرِّيحَ غُدُوها شَهْرٌ وَرَواحُها شَهْرٌ وَأَسَلنا لَهُ عَيْنَ القِطْرِ وَمِنَ الحِجْنِ مَن يَعْمَلُ
بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِ وَمَن يَزِغْ مِنْهُمْ عَن أَمْرِنَا نَذِقْهُ مِنْ عَذَابِ السَّعِيرِ (١٢)¹¹

Just as the Almighty had given David (sws) the knack to put iron to his use and from which he had considerably enhanced his land might, in a similar way, he gave Solomon (sws) the knack and power to control the winds. Through this power, Solomon was able to enhance maritime power so much that his ships would travel for months without any hindrance. I have already mentioned in verse 81 of Sūrah Anbiyā' that his sail-ships would travel to far off shores and such was the scientific manner in which these sails were made that adverse winds or windless or little wind situations would not interfere in their travels. It is mentioned thus in Sūrah Šu'ād: (٣٦:٣٧) فَسَخَرْنَا لَهُ الرِّيحَ تَجْرِي بِأَمْرِهِ رُخَاءَ حَيْثُ أَصَابَ (Thus We put the wind to his service which blew in harmony at his bidding wherever he intended to go, (38:36)). The words in Sūrah Anbiyā' are: (٨١:٢١) وَلَسَلِيمَانَ الرِّيحَ عَاصِفَةً تَجْرِي بِأَمْرِهِ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ الَّتِي بَارَكْنَا فِيهَا (And for Solomon We subjugated the stormy wind which would blow at his behest to the land in which We placed blessings, (21:81)).

In the verse under discussion, the lengthy travels of these ships are under discussion. A single travel would span a whole month. Though winds are mentioned, yet ships are implied. It is as if the cause is mentioned to connote its effect. This is because the real power Solomon (sws) had was regarding winds. Obviously, the long travels were only possible if these ships be of large size and at the same time the system to control the wind be so profound and stable that they were able to set sail in every type of sea while facing various types of winds. Here, it may be borne in mind that in classical eloquent Arabic, the words رَواح and غُدو also occur while being divested of the night and day stipulation to merely mean "coming" and "going." Thus, in Sūrah Āl-i 'Imrān, the words are: (١٢١:٣) وَإِذْ غَدَوْتَ مِنْ أَهْلِكَ تُبَوِّئُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ مَقَاعِدَ لِلْقِتَالِ (and when you left your house to position the Muslims in their battle-posts,

11. And We made the wind subservient to Solomon. He would travel away for a month and return back in a month and We caused a spring of molten brass to flow for him and from among the jinn also made those subservient to him, who would serve him at the behest of his Lord [and for them Our directive would be:] he among them who disobeys Our directives, We will make him taste the torment of Hell.

(3:121)). Similarly, while explaining the entry راح, the author of *Aqrab al-mawārid* writes: وقد يستعمل لطلق المضي و الذهاب (this word is also used merely to mean: to come and to go).¹²

It is evident from these details that subjugation of winds does not refer merely to their subjugation, the purpose is to point to the majesty of the naval fleet of Solomon (sws). It is exactly in line with what was said for David (sws) earlier: thus when it was mentioned that that iron was softened for him, the purpose was to point to his weaponry and military might. At another instance, an explanation to this is proffered in these words: (وَعَلَّمْنَاهُ صَنْعَةَ لَبُوسٍ لَّكُمْ لِيُحْصِنَكُمْ مِّنْ بَأْسِكُمْ (٢١: ٨٠) (And We taught him the art of such attires which could protect you in your wars, (21:80)). I have also alluded to the extent and might of his naval fleet in Sūrah Anbiyā'.

The word قِطْرٍ in عَيْنِ الْقِطْرِ means brass. The role it has played in the development of civilizations needs no elaboration. A study of the history of those times reveals that in the era of Solomon (sws) large reserves of brass were discovered and he efficiently used them in the construction and advancement of the society. It is evident from the verse, that brass was found in molten form and then after drying it was put to various uses. The huge cauldrons and troughs mentioned ahead were obviously made from this brass. It is evident from history, that in the construction of the Temple also, Solomon (sws) used this metal. Just as today, fountains of oil have been made to flow by God, in the times of Solomon (sws) fountains of brass were made to flow by Him. Each and every treasure of the earth discovered in the past or has been discovered today or will be discovered in the future owes its discovery to God's guidance. People who have insight know that the real source of all this is God; however, people whose eyes have been dazzled by science think that they are its source.

Consider next the section of the verse: وَمِنَ الْجِنَّ مَنْ يَعْمَلُ بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِ. It has already been mentioned in Sūrah Naml that God had blessed Solomon (sws) with a discipline through which he would control rebellious jinn and used them to accomplish certain tasks. It is evident from the verse under discussion that these jinn were not directly under the control of Solomon (sws); in fact, they would obey him on God's bidding and if anyone of them disobeyed God, he would be punished by God, as is evident from the next words of the verse: وَمَنْ يَزِغْ مِنْهُمْ عَنْ أَمْرِنَا نُذِقْهُ مِنْ عَذَابِ السَّعِيرِ (He among them who disobeys Our directives, We

12. Sa'īd al-Khūrī al-Shartūnī, *Aqrab al-mawārid fī fuṣaḥi al-'arabiyyah wa al-shawārid*, 1st ed., vol. 2 (Tehrān: Dār al-uswah, 1416 AH), 451.

will make him taste the torment of Hell.). Some people think that the word jinn refers to gigantic and powerful men. However, this view is not correct because it is clearly mentioned in Sūrah Naml that the army of Solomon (sws) consisted of the jinn, human beings and birds: وَحُشِرَ لِسُلَيْمَانَ جُنُودُهُ مِنَ الْجِنِّ وَالْإِنسِ وَالطَّيْرِ (٢٧: ١٧) (And for the inspection of Solomon (sws), his army consisting of the jinn, human beings and birds was gathered, (27:17)). If jinn implied human beings, then there was no need of mentioning the jinn here separately.

يَعْمَلُونَ لَهُ مَا يَشَاءُ مِنْ مَحَارِبَ وَتَمَاثِيلَ وَجِفَانٍ كَالْجَوَابِ وَقُدُورٍ رَاسِيَاتٍ اعْمَلُوا آلَ دَاوُودَ شُكْرًا وَقَلِيلٌ مِّنْ عِبَادِيَ الشَّكُورُ (١٣)¹³

This verse mentions details of the errands on which Solomon (sws) would employ the jinn. Some of these errands relate to construction while others fulfill cultural and welfare needs. When in their days of decadence the Jews were afflicted with base and occult disciplines, they ascribed these nonsensical things to Solomon (sws). Here the Qur'ān has specified that the discipline through which he subjugated the jinn was given to him especially by God out of His grace. It had nothing to do with base or occult disciplines and whatever tasks he assigned to the jinn were all related to construction and other needs of the society; never did he use them for any evil purpose. This has been explained in detail in verse 101 of Sūrah Baqarah.

The words مَحَارِبَ وَتَمَاثِيلَ refer to the fact that Solomon (sws) would employ the jinn to make *maḥārīb* and *tamāsīl*. The word *miḥrāb*, in my opinion, is used in its common meaning because arches are the most prominent structure of a building that foremost come to the notice of an onlooker. Hence the art of construction is the most visible in them. Among the buildings made by Solomon (sws), the details of how the Temple and the palace were constructed are found in the Bible. It is evident from this that the arches were constructed in the most exquisite manner. Patterns of beautiful flowers were made on them.

The word تَمَاثِيلَ is the plural of تمثال which refers to the portrait of something or its carved form or its portrait or its statue or sculpture. It can be of non-living things like seas, mountains, trees, bushes and flowers etc and can also be of a real or hypothetical living being like human beings, angels, the jinn and animals etc. It is evident from the

13. They would make for him whatever he pleased: arches, statues, basins as large as watering-troughs, and stationed cauldrons – “Be grateful! House of David.” And few among My servants are grateful.

Bible that Solomon (sws) built both these types of تَمَائِيل. For example, where his palace is mentioned, the words are:

On the panels between the uprights were lions, bulls and cherubim. (1 Kings, 7:29)

Similarly, where the construction of the Temple is referred to, the words are:

For the inner sanctuary he made a pair of cherubim out of olive wood, each ten cubits high. One wing of the first cherub was five cubits long, and the other wing five cubits. (1 Kings, 7:23-24)

The inside of the temple was cedar, carved with gourds and open flowers. (1 Kings, 6:18)

He also covered the floors of both the inner and outer rooms of the temple with gold. (1 Kings, 6:30)

As for the pictures and statues of non-living things, there is no difference of opinion in they being allowed, however, it can be grasped as to how Solomon (sws) regarded the statues and sculptures of living beings as allowed. If the answer to this question is the one given by our exegetes that these things were allowed in the *sharī'ah* of the Israelites, then this is based on their ignorance from the Torah. A clear prohibition of these things is mentioned in the Torah. Thus it is stated:

"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. "You shall have no other gods before me. "You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God. (Exodus, 20:2-5)

It can clearly be seen here that there exists a prohibition of making a picture or a statue. Hence it is incorrect to believe that these things were not forbidden in previous *sharī'ahs*. And one can also not think that Solomon (sws) would have violated any directive found in the Torah. For this reason, my opinion is that he would have made only those pictures and statues which related to art alone and did not possess any religious sanctity whatsoever; however, when idol worship found itself among the Jews, such things must have been made by kings and to give

religious sanction to them they must have ascribed them to Solomon (sws). It has already been shown in the exegesis of Sūrah Baqarah that the Jews had attributed the invention of base disciplines to Solomon (sws) as well. A refutation had been made of this view there. Similar nonsensical things have been ascribed to him in the Book of Kings. It should remain in consideration that the Jews have not presented Solomon (sws) as a prophet of God but as a materialistic king and have tried to smear every aspect of his character.

In the expression *وَجَفَانٍ كَالْجَوَابِ وَقُدُورٍ رَاسِيَاتٍ* the word *جَفَانٍ* is the plural of *جَفْنَة*. It means basins and large plates and the word *جَوَابِيَة* is the plural of *جَابِيَة* and means watering-troughs. The word *رَاسِيَاتٍ* is an adjective used for mountains. Here it is used for huge cauldrons which would be so heavy that it would not be easy to take them from one place to another. They would be generally fixed at one place over hearths and fire places and a very large quantity of food would be cooked in them at the same time.

In the earlier section of the verse, it was depicted how art flourished in the time of Solomon (sws). In this section of the verse, his generosity and munificence are alluded to. The jinn would make huge basins as large as watering-troughs for him and heavy cauldrons which would be stationed at one place. These details signify Solomon's generosity. If the bigheartedness and munificence of a person needs to be highlighted, only two words in Arabic are sufficient of this: *لَهُ قُدُورٌ رَاسِيَاتٌ*. It is this metaphor which classical Arab poets use for their generous people like Ḥatim al-Tā'ī (d. 578 AH).

It is evident from this that the culture and civilization founded by Solomon (sws) did not merely have the shine of art, and science in it, it was also marked with generosity and kindness for the deprived. It is for this reason that the Almighty has praised his endeavour in this regard. A society in which both these aspects simultaneously exist is a blessed one. On the other hand, a society which has the grandeur of art in it but in which the poor suffer is a fiendish society.

The words *اعْمَلُوا آلَ دَاوُدَ شُكْرًا* express the obligation to God's favours and blessings on Solomon (sws). He was told that he should not be led away from the path of righteousness after receiving the gifts of science and art and all other wonders; on the contrary, he should show gratitude and use each gift in the right manner and place. This advice, in general, emanates from the very existence of a favour of God; however, since Solomon (sws) was a prophet of God, he was given this advice through divine revelation. This is mentioned repeatedly in both the Psalms and the book of Proverbs. Here the address found in the expression *وَالْأَلِ دَاوُدَ* is meant to remind Solomon (sws), his family and his followers to follow

his father in thanking God. This is because he has actually inherited all these favours and all this grandeur from him, and his father was given all this by the Almighty as a reward for his gratefulness.

The words **وَقَلِيلٌ مِّنْ عِبَادِيَ الشَّاكِرُونَ** express a note of caution and a very important one: this path is not easy to tread; it is fraught with danger. God blesses many with His favours but few are thankful to Him; most people after receiving these favours become disobedient and rebellious. From here, one can gather a very important point of the philosophy of religion: among the trials of patience and gratitude, the trial of gratitude is more difficult. The sayings of Jesus (sws) also corroborate this fact. He has explained this reality in the following words: "Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." (Matthew, 19:24)

فَلَمَّا قَضَيْنَا عَلَيْهِ الْمَوْتَ مَا دَلَّهُمْ عَلَى مَوْتِهِ إِلَّا دَابَّةُ الْأَرْضِ تَأْكُلُ مِنْسَأَتَهُ فَلَمَّا خَرَ
تَبَيَّنَتِ الْجِنَّ أَن لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ الْغَيْبَ مَا لَبِثُوا فِي الْعَذَابِ الْمُهِينِ (١٤)¹⁴

The previous verses have totally refuted those who were afflicted with the wrong notion that all of Solomon's achievements were, God forbid, dependent on the jinn. Now in this verse, it is further pointed out that the jinn have no means to know the matters of the unseen. They have no information about them just as other creatures of God have no information about them. In order to clarify this point, the incident of Solomon's death is referred to. At the time of his death, he was overseeing the tasks he had assigned to the jinn but the latter never came to know of it. They continued to work in forced labour. Finally, after a long time they came to know that Solomon (sws) had died. It was then that they were able to secure freedom from his slavery.

The whole incident seems to have happened like this: at the time of his death, Solomon (sws) was personally supervising important tasks especially the ones he had assigned to the jinn. Thus he was overseeing some construction work while leaning on his walking stick when death overtook him. However, he continued to stand on the support of his stick and the jinn continued with their work thinking that Solomon (sws) was watching them. Considerable time elapsed during which termite ate his stick from below after which his body fell to the ground.

14. Thus when We had decreed his death none except a worm who would eat away his stick informed them of his death. So when he fell down, only then did the jinn realized that had they knowledge of the unknown, they would not have remained in this humiliating scourge.

The occasion and context in which the expression دَابَّةُ الْأَرْضِ occurs shows that the reference is to termite. The word مِئْسَاةٌ means "stick." The verse does not mention the duration for which Solomon (sws) remained in this state. However, neither is it improbable that his dead body remained in this position for sometime nor is it improbable that termite ate away part of his stick. Termites are very vicious insects and are capable of eating away wood in a very short time especially if they are large in number. Sticks and staffs are easy prey for them. Moreover, the nature of the incident in this case was very special. It was the will of God that the death of Solomon (sws) take place in such a manner that it becomes evident to people that the wind and the jinn who were under his control were not able to save him from this sudden death. The incident should also happen in a way that the wrong notion of jinn that they [-the Jinn-] know or can know the matters of the unknown. In order to explain these facts, the Almighty gave death to Solomon (sws) in this manner. And God can do whatever He wants to accomplish a task He intends to realize.

The words تَبَيَّنَتِ الْجِنَّ أَنْ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ الْغَيْبَ مَا لَبِثُوا فِي الْعَذَابِ الْمُهِينِ allude to the fact that the mischievous jinn would be continuously be on the look out to eavesdrop on the matters of the unseen world (*al-ghayb*), and for this purpose they would sit in various stations in the heavens, as is evident from Sūrah Jinn and from various other places in the Qur'ān. They had successfully bluffed human beings who had been lured away by them that they had the means to be aware of the secrets of the unknown. However, the incident of Solomon's death was enough to open their eyes; they were not even able to have knowledge of something that was so close by, what to speak of the secrets of the heavens. As a result of this lack of knowledge, they had to continue with their humiliating punishment of subjugation.

It is also evident from the above words that Solomon (sws) had only subjected mischievous jinn to forced labour and that his knowledge of subjugation related to them only.

لَقَدْ كَانَ لِسَبَإٍ فِي مَسْكَنِهِمْ آيَةٌ جَنَّتَانِ عَنْ يَمِينٍ وَشِمَالٍ كُلُّوا مِنْ رِزْقِ رَبِّكُمْ وَاشْكُرُوا
لَهُ بَلَدُهُ طَيِّبَةٌ وَرَبُّهُ غَفُورٌ (١٥)¹⁵

The people of Sabā' have already been mentioned in verse 22 of Sūrah

15. And for the natives of Sheba also, there was a great sign in their dwelling-place: rows of orchards both on their left and on their right. "Benefit from the sustenance of your Lord and be grateful to Him." Luxuriant and fertile land and forgiving is your Lord.

Naml. They inhabited the area now called Yemen. It was a very fertile and lush land. A series of luxuriant orchards marked the borders of its main highway. These orchards were found all over their territory as well. However, these people did not give due regard to this blessing of God. As a retribution for this ingratitude, the Almighty sent a flood to then which destroyed the whole country. Earlier, the characters of David (sws) and Solomon (sws) were presented as grateful servants of God. Here in this verse the fate of ungrateful people is depicted. In verses 112-113 also, the Quraysh are asked to seek a lesson from the exemplary fate they met.

Consider the words: لَقَدْ كَانَ لِسَبَإٍ فِي مَسْكَنِهِمْ آيَةٌ جَنَّتَانِ عَنْ يَمِينٍ وَشِمَالٍ. The word سَبَإٍ refers to the people of Sabā'. The word مَسْكَن here means "territory" or "land." The word آيَةٌ is not defined by an *alif lām* to portray its majesty and magnitude. The implication is that for the people of Sabā' existed a great sign of God's mercy and providence as well as of his blessings and favours. However, they did not give it due importance and also did not learn the lesson that was meant to be learnt from it.

The words جَنَّتَانِ عَنْ يَمِينٍ وَشِمَالٍ explain this sign: a series of orchards existed on both their both sides ie left and right. It is evident from this that their main highway passed through the centre of their territory, and on both sides of this highway was a succession of orchards. The word جَنَّتَان here does not mean two "orchards." It means "two lines of orchards." Such usage of a dual noun are found in Arabic and here concomitant factors points to this usage of the word.

The words كُلُوا مِنْ رِزْقِ رَبِّكُمْ وَاشْكُرُوا لَهُ state the lesson that can be learnt from this great sign of God and which should have been learnt from the people of Sabā'. These manifestations of advancement and grandeur by their very existence are calling out that people should benefit from these blessings of God and show gratitude to Him.

The word بَلَدٌ طَيِّبٌ in رَبُّ غَفُورٌ طَيِّبٌ means "lush and fertile." It is used in this meaning at many places in the Qur'ān. The lesson people have been told to learn in the previous part of the verse is extended here. If they observe their land with deep insight they will come to know that the Lord who has provided them with abundant and ample blessings is very Forgiving and Merciful. Even though they did not deserve it and in spite of their ungratefulness He has richly provided them. I have been pointing at various instances of this exegesis that expressing gratitude to someone who confers favours and blessings is an obvious requirement of human nature. A person who is devoid of this awareness is worse than an animal.

فَأَعْرَضُوا فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ سَيْلَ الْعَرِمِ وَبَدَّلْنَاهُمْ بِجَنَّتَيْهِمْ جَنَّتَيْنِ ذَوَاتِ أُكُلٍ خَمْطٍ وَأَثَلٍ
وَشَيْءٍ مِّن سِدْرٍ قَلِيلٍ¹⁶

Some lexicographers are of the opinion that the word عَرِم means “pounding rain” and others say that it is the plural of عَرِمَة which refers to stones gathered in many layers one over the other. From here it came to be used as a structure or bulwark erected in a valley to stop water. It is stated in *Aqrab al-mawārid*: سد يعترض به الوادي (a dam that is constructed in the middle of a valley).¹⁷ Mangla and Tarbela dams are its examples in Pakistan. It is evident from history that the people of Sabā' had a very long and wide dam which would protect them from the danger of floods and also irrigate their lands when needed. It is named Sadd-i Ma'ārib. Ma'ārib was the capital of Sabā', It was probably destroyed in 542 AD as a result of which the whole country was destroyed.

The words فَأَعْرَضُوا فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ سَيْلَ الْعَرِمِ express the fact that after receiving God's favour instead of becoming thankful to Him they became arrogant. It is evident from verse 113 of Sūrah Nahl that the Almighty sent a messenger to them to warn them but they showed indifference to him. Finally, the torment of God came upon them in the form of a huge flood and destroyed this dam which routed their whole land.

In the section وَبَدَّلْنَاهُمْ بِجَنَّتَيْهِمْ جَنَّتَيْنِ ذَوَاتِ أُكُلٍ خَمْطٍ وَأَثَلٍ وَشَيْءٍ مِّن سِدْرٍ قَلِيلٍ the word خَمْط means bitter and having a bad taste. In other words, this storm ravaged them in such a manner that the lush and luxuriant orchards were turned into some trees having bitter fruit and some bushes of lotus. It is evident from these details that the flood not only destroyed their whole territory but also was instrumental in depositing a layer of mud or sand on it which changed the nature of the trees which remained and the whole land grew wild bushes and shrubs.

ذَلِكَ جَزَيْنَاهُمْ بِمَا كَفَرُوا وَهَلْ نُجَازِي إِلَّا الْكَفُورَ¹⁸

The word مجازات means “to give return.” A return can be both good and bad. Hence it is the context which determines which meaning is implied at an instance. Here the occasion shows that a bad return is meant. In

16. Then they disobeyed; so We let loose upon them the waters of the dam and replaced their gardens by two others bearing insipid fruit, tamarisks, and a few Lote-trees.

17. Sa'īd al-Khūrī al-Shartūnī, *Aqrab al-mawārid*, vol. 3, 532.

18. Thus did We punish them for their ingratitude; and We badly punish none but the ungrateful.

other words, the verse would mean: "We gave them this punishment because of their ungrateful attitude, and such punishments We give to none except the ungrateful."

وَجَعَلْنَا بَيْنَهُمْ وَبَيْنَ الْقُرَى الَّتِي بَارَكْنَا فِيهَا قُرَى ظَاهِرَةً وَقَدَّرْنَا فِيهَا السَّيْرَ سِيرُوا فِيهَا لَيَالِي وَأَيَّامًا آمِنِينَ (١٨)¹⁹

The words *الْقُرَى الَّتِي بَارَكْنَا فِيهَا* refer to Syria and its nearby countries with whom the people of Sabā' had trade relations. These countries were very fertile. That is why the adjectival phrase *بَارَكْنَا فِيهَا* is used for them. Trade relations with countries which are fertile are a source of income and riches.

The expression *قُرَى ظَاهِرَةً* refers to cities and dwellings which were situated on the highway on both sides of which were a series of orchards. In other words, besides cities which were situated inland there were cities situated at appropriate distances on this highway also where caravans could stop. They could stop here without any danger and take rest before moving on.

The words *وَقَدَّرْنَا فِيهَا السَّيْرَ* imply that these dwellings were at such appropriate distances from one another as if the Almighty Himself had set their distances.

The words *سِيرُوا فِيهَا لَيَالِي وَأَيَّامًا آمِنِينَ* depict what these favours of God call out through their very existence. It is as if after making all these elaborate arrangements for them, providence had erected a placard for them at regular intervals on which was written that all this arrangement has been done for them so they could travel during the day as well as the night without any fear. Words to the effect: "and remain grateful to the Lord Who has made all these arrangements," are suppressed. The reason why they are suppressed is that every favour entails gratitude and this is already mentioned in verse 15 earlier. For this reason, instead of repeating it, the next verse (ie. verse 19) portrays their attitude which deprived them of these favours.

Here it needs to be kept in mind that the Almighty has ascribed all these favours and riches directly to Himself. This is actually a statement of fact that whatever a person gains in this world is because of God's grace; however, because of his ungratefulness, he thinks that whatever he has is because of his own planning. It is this lack of insight which is the reason

19. And between them and the cities that We have blessed, We populated roadside settlements and measured out distances of travel between them. "Travel through them by night and day in safety."

for man's drifting away from the right path. Scientific inventions have also enhanced this conceit so much that only God can now remove it.

فَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا بَاعِدْ بَيْنَ أَسْفَارِنَا وَظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ فَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَحَادِيثَ وَمَزَّقْنَاهُمْ كُلَّ مُمَرِّقٍ
إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّكُلِّ صَبَّارٍ شَكُورٍ²⁰

These words are not uttered by them; they in fact portray what emanates from their very existence. The attitude they adopted after being blessed with so many favours showed that they did not deserve them; they in fact deserve that their settlements be ruined and their journeys became difficult for them and that all their favours be confiscated from them. Several examples of such portrayal of situations have passed by in previous *sūrahs*. It has been explained earlier that the real evidence is that of the situation and not what is uttered by words. The words of the Jews cited by the Qur'ān (٩٣: ٢) قَالَوْا سَمِعْنَا وَعَصَيْنَا (They said: we listened and we disobeyed, (2: 93)) are also a portrayal of their situation and are not verbal utterances.

The words وَظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ imply that they were ungrateful to God and were disobedient to Him and in this way wronged their own souls and invited the wrath of God. They could not harm God in any way.

The words فَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَحَادِيثَ state the consequence of their ungratefulness. They were routed and ravaged and ultimately became a tale of the past.

The words وَمَزَّقْنَاهُمْ كُلَّ مُمَرِّقٍ refer to the fact that whoever remained after the flood struck them were scattered here and there because the economy of the country was destroyed. Some went hither and some thither.

Consider now the next part: إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّكُلِّ صَبَّارٍ شَكُورٍ. Earlier just as in verse 17 the real lesson that needed to be learned from this account was referred to by the words وَهَلْ نُجَازِي إِلَّا الْكُفُورَ (and such punishments We give only to the ungrateful), precisely the same lesson it alluded to here by these words. A little deliberation shows that the account of the people of Sabā' is repeated here twice. First after mentioning the fertility and luxuriance of their land, their ungratefulness and its consequence are alluded to and second after referring to their social development and advancement in trading their dispersion and scattering about as a consequence of their ungratefulness. This style has been adopted so that the real purpose for which this account is narrated does not disappear from the eyes. Several examples of this subtle style exist in the Qur'ān.

20. Thus they said: "Lord! Distance us from our journeys." And they sinned against their souls; so We made them a tale of the ancients and totally routed them. Indeed, there are signs in it for every steadfast, thankful person.

Patience and gratitude are counterparts to one another. They are needed simultaneously. Those who do not have patience in them cannot be expected to be grateful as one must be and those who are not grateful cannot be patient. In the test people are put through in this world, a person is tried at every step to check his patience and gratitude. It is on this trial that his success or failure in the Hereafter is based. The verse says that in this account there are many signs for the patient and grateful. For example:

– Whatever favours a person enjoys in this world are granted by God; hence instead of becoming arrogant, he should remain grateful to God and obedient to Him.

– Whatever favours a person receives is not because he is entitled to them but because he will be tried and tested on their basis. God wants to see whether a person becomes grateful or ungrateful on receiving them.

– Nations who fail in this test encounter the consequence of this failure in their collective capacity in this world and in the Hereafter each person will encounter its consequences in his individual capacity.

وَلَقَدْ صَدَقَ عَلَيْهِمْ إِبْلِيسُ ظَنَّهُ فَاتَّبَعُوهُ إِلَّا فَرِيقًا مِّنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (٢٠)

The view and opinion of Iblīs referred to by this verse is the one he had expressed before the Almighty when he was directed to bow down before Adam (sws) and he had not complied with this command. At that time, while addressing God, he had said that he will lure the progeny of Adam (sws) in such a way that a majority of them will follow him instead of God. The words in Sūrah A'rāf are: (١٧ : ٧) وَلَا تَحْدُ أَكْثَرُهُمْ شَاكِرِينَ (And you will find most of them ungrateful to You, (7:17)). The reason of mentioning this promise of Iblīs here is to point to the fate he will meet: when these people proved that the view of Iblīs about them came true, then their fate will also necessarily come before them in this world and the next: in this world they were consigned to the torment of the flood and in the next they will be thrown into Hell. Where the above mentioned threat of Iblīs is stated in the Qur'ān, right after it the response of God is also mentioned: (١٨ : ٧) لَّمِن تَبِعَكَ مِنْهُمْ لَأَمْلَأَنَّ جَهَنَّمَ مِنْكُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ (Those who follow you, I will fill [the belly of] Hell with all of you, (11:119)).

Consider next the part: إِلَّا فَرِيقًا مِّنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ. I have stated while explaining verse 113 of Sūrah Nahl that the Almighty had sent a messenger to the people of Sabā'. It is evident from the verse under discussion that their majority denied this messenger. Very few people professed faith in him, and only they remained secure from the

21. And Satan made his view about them come true. So they followed him except for a group of believers. And he had no power over them.

punishment which visited the whole nation.

وَمَا كَانَ لَهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِّنْ سُلْطَانٍ إِلَّا لِنَعْلَمَ مَنْ يُّؤْمِنُ بِالْآخِرَةِ مِمَّنْ هُوَ مِنْهَا فِي شَكٍّ وَرَبُّكَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ حَفِيظٌ ²²(٢١)

This verse is meant to dispel a doubt forthwith: no one should be led to believe that Satan has any authority over people so that he can lead astray anyone he wants to. The verse says that he does not have any such authority. The only option he has is to invite people to vice and this respite has been given to him so that God can test people as to who among them has a faith strong enough that keeps that person on the right path in spite of all the luring of Satan, and who among them is inflicted with doubts and led away by Satan. A verb to the effect أَنْظَرْنَاهُ (We gave him respite) or أَمَهَلْنَاهُ (We gave him respite) is suppressed before لِنَعْلَمَ and examples of such oppression can be seen in earlier *sūrahs*.

The words وَرَبُّكَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ حَفِيظٌ imply that after sending mankind and Satan to face this test, He has not detached Himself from their affairs; in fact, He is looking after everything. It is not possible that Satan exceed his bounds or that the invocations of human beings go unanswered. If a person fulfills His obligation to the best of his ability God will help in this world and will also richly reward all his deeds. It is evident from this that people should not desist from their obligation by being overcome with the despair of dominance by Satan and his progeny. God has indeed given respite to Satan; however, He has not consigned the world to him. On the contrary, He is guarding all matters.

Section III: Verses (22-27)

It is evident from the previous verses that mercy and punishment are in the hands of God. For this reason He alone deserves to be worshipped and shown gratitude to. In the succeeding verses, the Idolaters are challenged regarding their deities whom they regarded to be partners of God and in whom they had pinned their hopes to escape God's grasp. They are asked that if they have any argument in favour of these deities, they should bring it forth. At the same time, it is declared from the tongue of the Prophet (sws) that if they do not have any argument in

22. Our only aim was to distinguish those who had conviction in the Hereafter from those who were in doubt about it and Your Lord is watching over everything.

support of their claim and it is only based on obduracy and arrogance, then wasting time on them is fruitless and their matter shall be consigned to God. He is the best of judges. Readers may proceed to study the forthcoming verses in the light of this background.

قُلْ ادْعُوا الَّذِينَ رَعِمْتُمْ مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ لَا يَمْلِكُونَ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا لَهُمْ فِيهِمَا مِنْ شِرْكٍَ وَمَا لَهُ مِنْهُمْ مِّنْ ظَهِيرٍ (٢٢) وَلَا تَنْفَعُ الشَّفَاعَةُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا لِمَنْ أَذِنَ لَهُ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا فُزِّعَ عَنْ قُلُوبِهِمْ قَالُوا مَاذَا قَالَ رَبُّكُمْ قَالُوا الْحَقُّ وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْكَبِيرُ (٢٣) قُلْ مَنْ يَرْزُقُكُمْ مِّنَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ قُلْ اللَّهُ وَإِنَّا أَوْ إِيَّاكُمْ لَعَلَىٰ هُدًى أَوْ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ (٢٤) قُلْ لَا تُسْأَلُونَ عَمَّا أَجْرَمْنَا وَلَا نُسْأَلُ عَمَّا نَعْمَلُونَ (٢٥) قُلْ يَجْمَعُ بَيْنَنَا رَبَّنَا ثُمَّ يَفْتَحُ بَيْنَنَا بِالْحَقِّ وَهُوَ الْفَتَّاحُ الْعَلِيمُ (٢٦) قُلْ أَرُونِي الَّذِينَ أَلْحَقْتُمْ بِهِ شُرَكَاءَ كَلَّا بَلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ (٢٧)

Say: "Call on those whom you deify besides God. They have not the slightest authority in the heavens and the earth. Neither is there anyone who is His partner in them nor is there anyone from them who can help Him." And no intercession will be of any use before Him except for whom He permits. Until when fear is banished from their hearts, they will ask: "What has your Lord directed?" "The Truth," they will reply. "And He is the most High, the Great One." (23)

Ask them: "Who can provide for you from the heavens and the earth?" Say: "God. And either one among us is rightly guided or is in open error." Say: "You are not accountable for our crimes, nor are we accountable for your deeds." Say: "Our Lord will gather us all together; then He will judge between us with complete fairness and it is He Who decides and is All-knowing." (24-26)

Say: "Show me those whom you have associated with Him. By no means! In fact, He is the Mighty, the Wise." (27)

Explanation

قُلْ ادْعُوا الَّذِينَ رَعِمْتُمْ مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ لَا يَمْلِكُونَ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا لَهُمْ فِيهِمَا مِنْ شِرْكٍَ وَمَا لَهُ مِنْهُمْ مِّنْ ظَهِيرٍ (٢٢)²³

This is an open challenge thrown to the Idolaters; they should bring

23. Say: "Call on those whom you deify besides God. They have not the slightest authority in the heavens and the earth. Neither is there anyone who is His partner in them nor is there anyone from them who can help Him."

forth in the open those whom they associate with God so that it can be seen who and what are they. Such a challenge is given to the addressees when their claim is totally baseless and the truth has been conclusively conveyed to him in all respects. Precisely this very style is adopted ahead in verse 27 thus: (٢٧) قُلْ أَرُونِي الَّذِينَ أَخْلَقْتُمْ بِهِ شُرَكَاءَ كَلَّا بَلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ. Say: "Show me those whom you have associated with Him. By no means! He is the Mighty, the Wise." (34:27). The words لَا يَمْلِكُونَ مِثْقَالَ further explain this challenge: the Idolaters ascribe partners to God whereas they have not the slightest of authority in the heavens and the earth. In the first verse of this *sūrah*, this very subject is stated by the words: لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ (Whatever is in the heavens and the earth belongs to Him).

The words وَمَا لَهُمْ فِيهِمَا مِنْ شِرْكَ imply that these deities have no share in the creation of the heavens and the earth. At another place, the words are: مَا أَشْهَدُهُمْ خَلْقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ (١٨: ٥١) (I did not call any of them while creating the heavens and the earth that they should help me in the slightest way, (18:51)).

The words وَمَا لَهُ مِنْهُمْ مِّنْ ظَهِير imply that God has also not sought help from these deities in governing the affairs of the heavens and the earth. He alone is solely running these affairs, and this does not burden him at all. This is a refutation of the notion held by the Idolaters that since the earth is a far off area from Him, hence He must have asked His partners to govern them.

وَلَا تَنْفَعُ الشَّفَاعَةُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا لِمَنْ أَذِنَ لَهُ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا فُزِّعَ عَن قُلُوبِهِمْ قَالُوا مَاذَا قَالَ رَبُّكُمْ قَالُوا الْحَقُّ وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْكَبِيرُ²⁴ (٢٣)

After negating the authority of the deities, this verse refutes the concept of intercession of the Idolaters. They are told that if they are happily depending on the intercession of their deities, they must know that no one's intercession will have any weight before God except for whom He allows. In other words, no one will dare intercede without God's permission. Then even after this permission he will be able to intercede for only the person he has been allowed to. He will not be able to open his mouth for any person for whom he has not been granted permission. At other instances in the Qur'ān, it has been stated that

24. And no intercession will be of any use before Him except for whom He permits. Until when fear is banished from their hearts, they will ask: "What has your Lord directed?" "The Truth," they will reply. "And He is the most High, the Great One."

whatever such an intercessor will say will be the truth. No one will be able to state a falsehood as truth before God nor will he be able to utter anything which is contrary to the truth.

The verse under discussion in fact refutes the view of the Idolaters held about the angels they worshipped that they are daughters of God and hence they can convince their father in favour of anything they want to and God in return will listen to them out of His love and affection for them.

Consider next the section: *حَتَّىٰ إِذَا فُزِعَ عَنْ قُلُوبِهِمْ قَالُوا مَاذَا قَالَ رَبُّكُمْ قَالُوا الْحَقُّ*. The real meaning of the word *تفزع* is to strike fear; however, when it is used with the preposition *عَنْ* it means “to eliminate fear.” Thus the expression *فُزِعَ عَنْ قُلُوبِهِمْ* would mean: “fear would be exterminated from their hearts.” These words actually portray the situation the angels will face on the Day of Judgement: like all other creatures they too will be struck with dread and fear so that they will not even know what verdict has been passed by the Almighty regarding people – what to speak of cajoling the Almighty in favour of their intercession. When this dread is purged from their hearts, they will ask others: “What has been ordered by your Lord?” The reply will be whatever has been ordered is the truth in its entirety.

While refuting this very notion of the Idolaters about the angels, the words used in Sūrah Zumar are:

وَمَا قَدَرُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ قَدْرِهِ وَالْأَرْضُ جَمِيعًا قَبْضَتُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَالسَّمَاوَاتُ مَطْوِيَّاتٌ
بِيَمِينِهِ سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَىٰ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ وَنُفِخَ فِي الصُّورِ فَصَعِقَ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَنْ
فِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا مَنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ ثُمَّ نُفِخَ فِيهِ أُخْرَىٰ فَإِذَا هُمْ قِيَامٌ يَنْظُرُونَ (39: 67-68)

And these people did not give due importance to God's majesty. And on the Day of Judgement, He will hold the entire earth in His grasp and the heavens also will be folded in His hand. Glorious and exalted is He above the things they associate with Him. And when the trumpet is blown, all who are in the heavens and on earth shall fall down unconscious except those who shall be spared by God. Then when the trumpet is blown again, they shall suddenly rise and gaze around them. (39: 67-68)

These details relate to what will ensue on the Day of Judgement. Their true nature cannot be comprehended in this world but both these verses are of the same occasion and context. Hence if the verse under discussion is understood in the light of the Sūrah Zumar verses cited

above, it becomes evident that when the trumpet is sounded for the first time all creatures of heavens and the earth will fall down unconscious. Only those people will be secure from this who are kept secure by God. Such people are mentioned thus in the Qur'ān: (الْأَكْبَرُ: ٢١: ١٠٣) لَا يَحْزُنُهُمُ الْفَرَقُ (They will not be afflicted by the grief of the greatest horror, (21:103)). When the trumpet is sounded for the second time, everyone will get up and will look around terrified at what has happened and what is going to happen. It seems that it will be at this stage that the angels will ask the question stated in the verse as: مَاذَا قَالَ رَبُّكُمْ (what did your Lord say?) Evident from this question is the fear and dread that they will be overcome with. Thus they will themselves be dumbstruck at the situation, what to speak of taking the initiative in interceding for someone. They will ask others to find out what directive has been given by the Almighty. The reply they will get from others will merely be that whatever directive has been given is absolutely correct. The word الْحَقُّ is in the accusative because of a suppressed verb. The reply can possibly be from two people. It can be from those whose final fate will be settled on that day because on that day the truth will become evident to such an extent that no one will dare say that he has faced injustice. The reply can also be from people who were held secure from the horror of that day and who are referred to by the words إِلَّا مَنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ (except what God intends) in the above cited verses of Sūrah Zumar. If this second option is accepted, it would mean that the majority would entirely be occupied in thinking of their own selves on that day and thus have no time for any intercession, while those who will be protected by the horror of that day by the Almighty will cry out that whatever verdict has been given by God is correct. In other words, if this is the situation, then who are the ones the Idolaters are depending for intercession.

The words وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْكَبِيرُ state that exalted and lofty, majestic and powerful is the person of God. No one can dare open his tongue before Him without His permission nor does anyone have the caliber to access Him.

Among angels, Gabriel occupies the highest status before God; yet he too is helpless in accessing God's presence:

اگر یک سر موئے برتر پریم
فروغ تجلی بسوزد پریم

(If his wings advance forward by even the measure of a hair they will get burnt because of the intensity of divine disclosures.)

Further discussion on this issue will be found in the next *sūrah*.

قُلْ مَنْ يَرْزُقُكُمْ مِّنَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ قُلِ اللَّهُ وَإِنَّا أَوْ إِيَّاكُمْ لَعَلَىٰ هُدًى أَوْ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ (٢٤)²⁵

The verse poses the questions to them: Who in the heavens and the earth gives livelihood to them? Who sends down rain from the sky and causes various seasons? Who makes the seeds and crops they sow to grow and develop and who makes the vegetation lush green?

The words قُلِ اللَّهُ state that the answer to all these questions is that it is God Who does all this and this harmony between the heavens and the earth is clear evidence of the fact that they are under the control of a single powerful and mighty being.

The reason that the answer has been given by God Himself is that the addressees do not have any option to differ from this answer. It has already been explained at various places in this exegesis that the Idolaters of Makkah never regarded any of their deities to be the creator or provider; they only regarded them as intercessors and a means to procure the nearness of God. It is mentioned in the Qur'ān that if they are asked who provides them from the heavens and the earth, they will immediately reply that God does. Since this established reality was acknowledged by the addressees, hence it is stated here for this very reason.

The words وَإِنَّا أَوْ إِيَّاكُمْ لَعَلَىٰ هُدًى أَوْ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ imply that the basic message of the Prophet (sws) is what is just stated above as an established reality. If the addressees are disputing this reality, then there is no need for any further discussion or argument; either the Prophet (sws) and his companions are rightly guided and these addressees have strayed or it is the other way round. In other words, if merely because of stubbornness they have reached this extent in their unbecoming behaviour that at one instant they accept a reality and at the very next deny it, then further discussion is useless. Their matter now rests with God. He will decide who is on the right path and who has gone astray. In my opinion, this is a statement of acquittal from the Prophet (sws) and not an expression of tolerance, as is generally understood.

25. Ask them: "Who can provide for you from the heavens and the earth?" Say: "God. And either one among us is rightly guided or is in open error."

قُلْ لَا تُسْأَلُونَ عَمَّا أَجْرَمْنَا وَلَا نُسْأَلُ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ (٢٥)²⁶

This verse expresses in another way the declaration of acquittal sounded in the previous verse. The Prophet (sws) is told to ask his addressees that if they think that the Prophet (sws) and his companions are guilty of opposing their deities and age-old rituals, then he and his companions are prepared to be held accountable for this. Similarly, his addressees will be accountable for what they are doing and not the Prophet (sws). The Prophet (sws) and his companions were responsible to communicate the truth and they have fulfilled this responsibility; nothing can be gained from any further debate. They should do what they like and the Prophet (sws) and his companions will do what they like. God will decide on the Day of Judgment who is rightly guided and who has been led astray. This topic is also discussed in Sūrah Shūrā in the following words:

لَنَا أَعْمَالُنَا وَلَكُمْ أَعْمَالُكُمْ لَا حُجَّةَ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ (٤٢: ١٥)

Our deeds will be with us and your deeds will be with you; no discussion is now needed among us. (42:15)

In Sūrah Kāfirūn, this proclamation of acquittal is sounded by the words: لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ (١٠٩: ٦) (To you your religion and to me mine, (109:6)). In fact, this subject is discussed in the Qur'ān at various instances in different styles and it has a special context and background. The background is that when the addressees try to deny obvious facts because of stubbornness and arrogance, they are told that no room for any discussion is left; they should do what they are doing and the Prophet (sws) and his companions will stick to what they are doing. It may be noted that such verses of the Qur'ān have been generally interpreted to express tolerance and accommodation, yet they do not express tolerance; they portray acquittal and aversion. This wrong interpretation is the result of not taking into view the context and background of such verses.

قُلْ يَجْمَعُ بَيْنَنَا رَبُّنَا ثُمَّ يَفْتَحُ بَيْنَنَا بِالْحَقِّ وَهُوَ الْفَتَّاحُ الْعَلِيمُ (٢٦)²⁷

The Prophet (sws) is told to tell them that if they are not willing to

26. Say: "You are not accountable for our crimes, nor are we accountable for your deeds."

27. Say: "Our Lord will gather us all together; then He will judge between us with complete fairness and it is He Who decides and is All-knowing."

accept his message and that of his followers, then there is a day that will come in which God will gather both factions and then pass His Judgement with justice. He is the greatest judge; no one has the power to dispute His verdicts, and He has knowledge of all things. Nothing is hidden from Him.

قُلْ أَرُونِي الَّذِينَ أَلْحَقْتُمْ بِهِ شُرَكَاءَ كَلَّا بَلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ (٢٧)²⁸

What is stated in the first verse of the current set of verses is re-iterated here in a different style. Exuding from this style is sarcasm, rebuke and warning. They are dared to show what they worship besides God. They are asked to bring forth these deities who are regarded to be so exalted as to become partners of God.

After posing the question above, God Himself has answered it in the words كَلَّا بَلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ. I.e., there is no one of this status that he becomes God's partner. God's acknowledged attributes are then cited to bolster this refutation: the attribute الْعَزِيزُ shows that He is inaccessible, dominant and powerful; the attribute الْحَكِيمُ implies that all actions of God are based on great wisdom. Moreover, these attributes are cited with great emphasis signifying that only God is the most powerful and the most wise, and when these attributes are found in Him to perfection, polytheism cannot be linked to them in any way. This is because if someone is regarded as His partner because He is dependent on that partner as far as creating and governing this universe is concerned, then this will negate His attribute of الْعَزِيزُ (Powerful). If on the other hand someone is regarded as His partner considering that the partner because of his closeness and status will be able to induce Him to partiality in matters of justice, then this will negate His attribute of الْحَكِيمُ (Wise). Here it may be kept in mind that both these misconceptions were the real cause of the polytheism of the Idolaters. Here the Almighty by referring to both these attributes has severed the roots of both these misconceptions.

Section IV: Verses (28-39)

The succeeding verses deal with the objections and demands which the opponents were making to refute the message of the Qur'ān and the warning it sounded to them. Answers are given to these objections and demands and the fate which these people will necessarily meet is also

28. Say: "Show me those whom you have associated with Him. By no means! In fact, He is the Mighty, the Wise."

alluded to. It is because they are refuting a reality by seeking refuge in these objections and doubts. Readers may now proceed to study these verses.

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا كَافَّةً لِّلنَّاسِ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ (٢٨)
 وَيَقُولُونَ مَتَى هَٰذَا الْوَعْدُ إِن كُنتُمْ صَادِقِينَ (٢٩) قُلْ لَّكُمْ مَّيْعَادُ يَوْمٍ لَا تَسْتَأْخِرُونَ عَنْهُ
 سَاعَةً وَلَا تَسْتَقْدِمُونَ (٣٠) وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَنُؤْمِنَ بِهَٰذَا الْقُرْآنِ وَلَا بِالَّذِي بَيْنَ
 يَدَيْهِ وَلَوْ تَرَىٰ إِذِ الظَّالِمُونَ مَوْقُوفُونَ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ يَرْجِعُ بَعْضُهُمْ إِلَىٰ بَعْضٍ الْقَوْلَ يَقُولُ
 الَّذِينَ اسْتَضَعُوا لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا لَوْلَا أَنْتُمْ لَكُنَّا مُؤْمِنِينَ (٣١) قَالَ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا
 لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَضَعُوا أَنَحْنُ صَدَدْنَاكُمْ عَنِ الْهُدَىٰ بَعْدَ إِذْ جَاءَكُمْ بَلْ كُنتُمْ مُحْجَرِينَ (٣٢)
 وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ اسْتَضَعُوا لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا بَلْ مَكْرُ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ إِذْ تَأْمُرُونَنَا أَنْ نَكْفُرَ
 بِاللَّهِ وَنَجْعَلَ لَهُ أَندَادًا وَأَسَرُّوا النَّدَامَةَ لَمَّا رَأَوُا الْعَذَابَ وَجَعَلْنَا الْأَغْلَالَ فِي الْأَعْنَاقِ الَّذِينَ
 كَفَرُوا هَلْ يُجْزَوْنَ إِلَّا مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ (٣٣) وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِي قَرْيَةٍ مِّنْ نَّذِيرٍ إِلَّا قَالَ
 مُتْرَفُوهَا إِنَّا بِمَا أُرْسِلْتُمْ بِهِ كَافِرُونَ (٣٤) وَقَالُوا نَحْنُ أَكْثَرُ أَمْوَالًا وَأَوْلَادًا وَمَا نَحْنُ
 بِمُعَذِّبِينَ (٣٥) قُلْ إِنَّ رَبِّي يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَن يَشَاءُ وَيَقْدِرُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ
 (٣٦) وَمَا أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُكُمْ بِالَّتِي تُقَرِّبُكُمْ عِندَنَا زُلْفَىٰ إِلَّا مَن آمَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا
 فَأُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ جَزَاءُ الضَّعِيفِ بِمَا عَمِلُوا وَهُمْ فِي الْغُرَفَاتِ آمِنُونَ (٣٧) وَالَّذِينَ يَسْعَوْنَ فِي
 آيَاتِنَا مُعَاجِزِينَ أُولَٰئِكَ فِي الْعَذَابِ مُحْضَرُونَ (٣٨) قُلْ إِنَّ رَبِّي يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَن يَشَاءُ
 مِن عِبَادِهِ وَيَقْدِرُ لَهُ وَمَا أَنْفَقْتُمْ مِّن شَيْءٍ فَهُوَ يُخْلِفُهُ وَهُوَ خَيْرُ الرَّازِقِينَ (٣٩)

And We have sent you forth to all mankind so that you may deliver glad tidings and warnings to them but most people are not knowing this fact. And the say: "When will this threat materialize if you are truthful?" Tell them: "A specific day is appointed for you from which you will neither hold back the slightest nor come forward." (28-30)

And the disbelievers said: "We will neither believe in this Qur'an nor on what is ahead it is informing us of. And if only you were able to see when these wrongdoers will be made to stand before their Lord! They will be arguing among themselves. Those who were oppressed will tell the arrogant: "But for you, we would certainly have been among the believers." Then the arrogant will reply to the oppressed: "Did we stop you from being guided when it had come to you? In fact, you yourselves

are wrongdoers.” The oppressed will say to the arrogant: “It was your conspiracies of day and night [that hindered us from accepting the truth] when you would lure us to disbelieve in God and associate partners with Him.” And they will be ashamed in their hearts when they see the torment. And We will enchain the necks of the disbelievers. They shall be rewarded exactly according to their deeds. (31-33)

Whenever We sent a warner in a city, its affluent people said: “We reject the message with which you have been sent.” And they said: “We have been given greater wealth and more children than you and we shall never be afflicted with punishment.” Tell them: “It is my Lord Who gives abundantly to whom He wants and sparingly to whom He pleases. But most people are not aware of this fact.” Neither your wealth nor your children will bring you nearer to Us. Yet those who accepted faith and did righteous deeds will get manifold reward of their deeds and they will live in comfort in tall mansions. (34-37)

And those who strive to refute Our revelations to cause harm are the ones who will be cast into the torment. (38)

Say: “It is my Lord Who gives abundantly to whom He will and sparingly to him [if He pleases] and whatever you spend in charity, He will reward you for it and He is the best of providers.” (39)

Explanation

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا كَافَّةً لِّلنَّاسِ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ (٢٨)²⁹

This verse expresses sorrow at people who in order to reject the message of monotheism of the Qur’ān and its warnings about the punishments of the Herein and the Hereafter would demand that they be shown the promised doom. They would make this demand to harass the Prophet (sws). The Prophet (sws) is told that he has not been sent as one who brings doom and torment to his people; he has been sent as a deliverer of glad tidings and warnings so that he may give good news of salvation and mercy from God to people who after accepting his call profess faith and do righteous deeds; he should also warn those who reject him that God’s wrath and anger will necessarily visit them. The Prophet’s responsibility ends after he delivers these glad tidings and warnings. It is now up to God whether He punishes these people or not. When the time comes, God will show them this promised doom.

The words *وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ* are an expression of sorrow at the misfortune of people. Before sending punishment, the Almighty has sent

29. And We have sent you forth to all mankind so that you may deliver glad tidings and warnings to them but most people are not knowing this fact.

a messenger who warns them of this punishment; if they want, people can profess faith and do righteous deeds and thereby obtain a guarantee for eternal mercy. However, such is the misfortune of people that they demand punishment instead of mercy. They are not aware of the fact that when the Almighty sends His messenger to a people, then the truth is conclusively communicated to them. If they now reject it, then as per the established practice of God, they are destroyed. In the next *sūrah*, this fact is delineated in the following words:

إِنْ أَنْتَ إِلَّا نَذِيرٌ إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَإِنْ مِنْ أُمَّةٍ إِلَّا خَلَا فِيهَا نَذِيرٌ وَإِنْ يَكْذِبُوكَ فَقَدْ كَذَّبَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ جَاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُهُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَبِالْزُبُرِ وَبِالْكِتَابِ الْمُنِيرِ ثُمَّ أَخَذْتُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَكَيْفَ كَانَ نَكِيرِ (٣٥: ٢٣-٢٦)

You are only a warner. We have sent you with the truth as a bearer of glad tidings and warnings. And there is not a single community in which a warner has not come. And if these people reject you, this is nothing new; those before them also rejected. Their messengers came to them with veritable signs, with scriptures, and with a radiant Book. Then I seized these people. So see how My curse on them was! (35: 23-26)

The words *كَافَّةً لِلنَّاسِ* of this verse are worthy of consideration. Before Muḥammad (sws), all messengers came as warners to their people however since Muḥammad (sws) is the last of the prophets and messengers, he was sent towards all mankind. The Qur'ān has referred to this fact in various styles and prophecies found in the previous scriptures also highlight this status of Muḥammad (sws). I have already cited them in the exegesis of Sūrah Baqarah. Here, these words are meant to remind the People of the Book. In this phase of Muḥammad's preaching mission, they had started to support the Quraysh. Hence by referring to this aspect, they are informed that the messenger they are opposing in such a vehement manner is not merely a deliverer of glad tidings and warnings to the Quraysh; he will also decide the fate of the People of the Book. Hence if they want to play with danger, they should fully contemplate its consequences.

وَيَقُولُونَ مَتَى هَذَا الْوَعْدُ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ (٢٩)³⁰

The verse implies that instead of paying heed to the warnings of the

30. And the say: "When will this threat materialize if you are truthful?"

Messenger regarding God's punishment and preparing to save themselves from it, they try to belittle the messenger and his companions. They would sarcastically ask them about the time when this threat of punishment will materialize if they are truthful in their claim. The implication is that either they be shown the punishment or be informed of its time of arrival; otherwise, they will only regard it to be a bluff.

قُلْ لَكُمْ مِيعَادُ يَوْمٍ لَا تَسْتَأْخِرُونَ عَنْهُ سَاعَةً وَلَا تَسْقُدُمُونَ (٣٠)³¹

The verse directs the Prophet (sws) to respond to their question and tell them that they should not ask to hasten its arrival. A time has been set for it. When it arrives they will neither be able to stand back from it or take a step ahead. It has been explained at several places in this exegesis that God grants ample time to even those who are defiant and rebellious to him so that they are given full opportunity and they are left with no excuse. Only God knows when a people are left with no excuse. Not even His messenger is aware of this secret. The word *يَوْمٍ* here means "time" and the word *سَاعَةً* refers to "seconds" or to some very short span of time. Also concealed in this style of reply is sarcasm to the sarcastic question posed: on what impudence do they inquire about the time of this punishment? When that certain moment comes, no one will be able to avert it.

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَنْ نُؤْمِنَ بِهَذَا الْقُرْآنِ وَلَا بِالَّذِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَلَوْ تَرَى إِذِ الظَّالِمُونَ مَوْتُوفُونَ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ يَرْجِعُ بَعْضُهُمْ إِلَى بَعْضٍ الْقَوْلَ يَقُولُ الَّذِينَ اسْتُضْعِفُوا لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا لَوْلَا أَنْتُمْ لَكُنَّا مُؤْمِنِينَ (٣١)³²

People have generally interpreted *وَلَا بِالَّذِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ* in two ways: one opinion is that this refers to the books revealed before the Qur'ān; the second opinion is that this refers to the divine punishment and Day of Judgement about which the Qur'ān is informing people. In my view, the second opinion is more consistent with the context. In other words, the verse states that these people very stubbornly reply to the warnings of the Qur'ān that they will neither profess belief in this Qur'ān nor are they

31. Tell them: "A specific day is appointed for you from which you will neither hold back the slightest nor come forward."

32. And the disbelievers said: "We will neither believe in this Qur'an nor on what is ahead it is informing us of. And if only you were able to see when these wrongdoers will be made to stand before their Lord! They will be arguing among themselves. Those who were oppressed will tell the arrogant: "But for you, we would certainly have been among the believers."

willing to accept the divine punishment and Day of Judgement it is informing them of. What they meant was that if they are required to believe in such a thing, then they will only do so if they are shown to them. If they cannot be shown to them, then they are not willing to forcibly accept this threat.

The words *وَكَوْ تَرَىٰ إِذِ الظَّالِمُونَ مَوْقُوفُونَ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ فِي الظَّالِمُونَ* refer to these very unfortunate people who while disregarding God's mercy were demanding to see His punishment. The answer to the conditional clause is suppressed here as per linguistic principles. This style of suppression is adopted at places where the situation is beyond portrayal and depiction. In other words, what is emphasized is that today these wretched people are daring to deny the Qur'ān and its warnings about the Day of Judgement; however, if you were able to see them when they would stand before their Lord, then ...What is suppressed after "then" is so horrific that it cannot be expressed in words.

The words *يَرْجِعُ بَعْضُهُمْ إِلَىٰ بَعْضٍ الْقَوْلَ* mean that they will argue and dispute with one another. Details of this altercation are coming up in the succeeding verses. The implication is that today their leaders and followers are united on opposing the message of the Qur'ān. The leaders are leading the way in this opposition and the followers are vehemently following them; yet when both of them will be presented before God, the followers will hold the leaders responsible for leading them astray and the leaders will rebuke the followers that they themselves are responsible for going astray for they followed their leaders even though the truth had become clear to them. In other words, today the leaders are trying to convince their followers that they should trust them for they will be responsible for what the followers do; similarly, the masses have chosen to blindly follow them thinking that their leaders will protect them from any danger. When the real time comes, each group will know that it is responsible for what it had done; no one will bear the burden of the other.

Consider next the last part of the verse: *يَقُولُ الَّذِينَ اسْتَضَعِفُوا لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا: لَوْلَا أَنْتُمْ لَكُنَّا مُؤْمِنِينَ*. These words actually explain what is said earlier. The expression refers to the poor and the common masses who because of their helplessness and weakness were victimized by the rich capitalists. The expression *لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا* refers to their wealthy capitalist leaders who made their persons the barometer of truth and evil and induced people to follow them and went on to use them for opposing God and His Messenger. The section of the verse under discussion says that on that day the poor and the masses will blame their wealthy leaders that it is because of them that they are meeting this miserable fate and they would have professed faith had these leaders not led them astray. What they

will imply is that the truth was not hidden from them and they also wanted to adopt it yet it was the pressure of the leaders which subdued their urge to accept faith; it was against their desire that they were left bereft of the treasure of faith and had to ultimately reach this fate.

قَالَ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَضَعِفُوا أَنَحْنُ صَدَدْنَاكُمْ عَنِ الْهُدَىٰ بَعْدَ إِذْ جَاءَكُمْ
بَلْ كُنْتُمْ مُجْرِمِينَ (٣٢)³³

This verse spells out the answer given by the leaders to their followers. They will reject the blame cast on them that they were responsible for leading the masses astray. They will say that the masses themselves are to be blamed for this because they continued to follow them in spite of the fact the masses had received very clear guidance from God; that truth was neither hidden from them nor from their own selves; in fact, the truth had been conclusively communicated to them by God's Messenger. They will go on to say that had this not happened, they were ready to accept the blame to some extent. However, since they have stumbled in broad daylight, instead of blaming others they should only blame themselves. They will further say that both they and the masses are equal criminals.

Though the statement given in this verse is by the disbelievers, the Qur'ān has cited it as a true statement. It carries a lesson for the masses of all periods of time: no one will be absolved before God merely on the basis that others had led him astray; the quest for the truth is everyone's responsibility and once it becomes evident, it is his obligation to adhere to it as far as is possible for him. No one will be excused before God without undertaking this effort.

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ اسْتَضَعِفُوا لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا بَلْ مَكْرُ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ إِذْ تَأْمُرُونَنَا أَنْ نَكْفُرَ
بِاللَّهِ وَنَجْعَلَ لَهُ أَندَادًا وَأَسْرُوا التَّدَامَةَ لَمَّا رَأَوُا الْعَذَابَ وَجَعَلْنَا الْأَغْلَالَ فِي أَعْنَاقِ الَّذِينَ
كَفَرُوا هَلْ يُجْزَوْنَ إِلَّا مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ (٣٣)³⁴

This verse expresses the rejoinder from the masses. They will say that it is the day and night conspiracies of the leaders that led them astray; a

33. Then the arrogant will reply to the oppressed: "Did we stop you from being guided when it had come to you? In fact, you yourselves are wrongdoers."

34. The oppressed will say to the arrogant: "It was your conspiracies of day and night [that hindered us from accepting the truth] when you would lure us to disbelieve in God and associate partners with Him." And they will be ashamed in their hearts when they see the torment. And We will enchain the necks of the disbelievers. They shall be rewarded exactly according to their deeds.

whole propaganda had been launched by the leaders to lead them away from the message of God's messenger; these leaders had continued to teach and urge them to strongly adhere to disbelief and polytheism. Evident from this answer is the fact that they were fully aware of the truth but they could not follow it because of the perpetual conspiracies of their leaders.

Consider the next the words: وَأَسْرُوا التَّدَامَةَ لَمَّا رَأَوُا الْعَذَابَ. The expression وَأَسْرُوا التَّدَامَةَ is similar to أبطن العداوة. Feeling ashamed is something that relates to the heart. That is why the verb أَسْرَ is used with it. The purpose is to express the fact that when after this question and answer they see the torment of God hovering over them, they will feel very ashamed. It is also evident from this part of the verse that their excuse of being led astray by the conspiracies of their leaders will not be acceptable to God; they shall necessarily have to face Hell. The reason for feeling ashamed would be that at that time it will be fully evident to them that they followed their leaders against the calls of their conscience. When the consequences of following something evil against one's conscience come before a person, he is not merely faced with the dire nature of these consequences; he also faces the compunction of his conscience and this doubles his agony. This subject is also discussed in verses 66-68 of Sūrah Aḥzāb. Readers may look up their explanation if more explanation is needed.

The words وَجَعَلْنَا الْأَغْلَالَ فِي أَعْنَاقِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا state that God will put yolks around the necks of the disbelievers, and this actually points out to the similarity between an act and its consequence. People who while lulling their intellect and conscience to sleep consign their reins to others will find themselves with yolks around their necks which God would have put to punish them for this wrongdoing. The sentinels of Hell will drag them to Hell through these yolks.

The words هَلْ يُجْزَوْنَ إِلَّا مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ imply that the yolks that will be put around the necks of the disbelievers will not constitute any injustice to them. In fact, they will be a manifestation of whatever they did in the previous world. They disobeyed God by putting the yolks of slavery of other people round their necks as a result of which they were enchained by these yolks of Hell.

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِي قَرْيَةٍ مِّنْ نَّذِيرٍ إِلَّا قَالَ مُتْرَفُوهَا إِنَّا بِمَا أُرْسِلْتُمْ بِهِ كَافِرُونَ (٣٤)³⁵

These words sound an assurance to the Prophet (sws) that whatever the affluent and rich people of his times are doing to him is nothing new. All

35. Whenever We sent a warner in a city, its affluent people said: "We reject the message with which you have been sent."

such people have behaved in a similar manner in the past with their respective messengers. They too arrogantly told them that they will not accept the message with which they have been sent. In other words, neither are they prepared to accept his message of monotheism nor are they willing to entertain their false threat that if they do not accept faith they will face divine punishment.

Concealed in the linguistic style adopted in the expression *أُرْسِلْتُمْ بِهِ* is also the fact that the messengerhood claimed by him is merely a claim which has no basis in their eyes.

وَقَالُوا نَحْنُ أَكْثَرُ أَمْوَالًا وَأَوْلَادًا وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمُعَذَّبِينَ (٣٥)

The verse implies that the argument these affluent people of the past put forward was the same as the people of the Prophet's times are presenting. They told their respective messengers that they have far greater wealth and children. So they must bear in mind this fact while threatening them and alleging that their beliefs and deeds will not please God and that they are worthy of His wrath. The implication is that if the claim of the messengers was true, then these messengers should have been far wealthier and should have possessed more children. A further statement expressed by these affluent people is: *وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمُعَذَّبِينَ*. They reckoned that they would neither be punished in this world nor in the Hereafter if ever it comes as per the claim of the messengers. In other words, according to these rich people their state of affluence is belying the threat of the promised doom and making them conclude that the messengers are making false claims.

قُلْ إِنْ رَبِّي يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَقْدِرُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ (٣٦)

The verse asks the Prophet (sws) to reply to them that in this world the abundance of wealth and children is neither an indication of being God's favoured ones nor a paucity of these sources an indication of being unworthy in His sight. On the contrary, this abundance and paucity is based on God's authority and wisdom. If He grants abundance in the sustenance of some people, then His purpose is to test their gratitude. If he constricts the resources of some people, then His purpose is to try their patience. Real success is based on success in this test which will

36. And they said: "We have been given greater wealth and more children than you and we shall never be afflicted with punishment."

37. Tell them: "It is my Lord Who gives abundantly to whom He wants and sparingly to whom He pleases. But most people are not aware of this fact."

become evident to people in the Hereafter.

The words وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ imply that the majority of people are not aware of this reality. They are overcome by the foolishness that whatever wealth and status they have is the result of their competence and entitlement to it and corroborates that they are favoured ones of God. In this way, they are enticed by Satan and make the favours of God a scourge for themselves.

وَمَا أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُكُمْ بِالَّتِي تُقَرَّبُكُمْ عِنْدَنَا زُلْفَىٰ إِلَّا مَنْ آمَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَأُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ جَزَاءُ الضَّعْفِ بِمَا عَمِلُوا وَهُمْ فِي الْغُرَفَاتِ آمِنُونَ (٣٧)³⁸

The word زُلْفَىٰ is a verbal noun and is meant to emphasize the verb ie. تقربكم. The implication is that wealth and children are not the things which have even the slightest role in bringing a person close to God. He bestows these things to people to test them whether they become ungrateful to Him after receiving them or adopt the path of true faith and do righteous deeds. Thus what brings a person close to God is faith and good deeds and not wealth and children. In the absence of faith and righteous deeds, wealth and children will only add to the ruin of such people.

Consider next the words: فَأُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ جَزَاءُ الضَّعْفِ بِمَا عَمِلُوا. In Arabic, the word ضَعْف means the same magnitude of a thing as well as many times the magnitude of a thing however much this may be. Hence, a precise translation of these words would be: "As for those who accept faith and do righteous deeds, they will be rewarded many times for what they did." This "many times reward" is explained at other instances in the Qur'ān, and I have elucidated it in an appropriate place of this exegesis.

The word ضَعْف should not be construed as two times or double reward.³⁹

38. Neither your wealth nor your children will bring you nearer to Us. Yet those who accepted faith and did righteous deeds will get manifold reward of their deeds and they will live in comfort in tall mansions.

39. Ibn Manzūr writes:

و جائز في كلام العرب أن يكون الضعف الواحد و ما زاد عليه من الأمثال يقال لك ضعفه اي مثلاه و ثلاثة أمثال لأنه في الأصل زيادة غير محصورة

In classical Arabic it is perfectly legitimate to regard الضعف as something which is twice or many times more than the original entity. It is said: لك ضعفه. It means something which is double or thrice because in reality it

The clause *وَهُمْ فِي الْغُرَفَاتِ آمِنُونَ* refers to the fact that in this world danger lurks everywhere for one's wealth and children and no one can protect oneself from these dangers. Yet people who make their wealth and children a means of salvation in the Hereafter will be rewarded with abiding and eternal reward. They will never feel any apprehension in this regard.

وَالَّذِينَ يَسْعَوْنَ فِي آيَاتِنَا مُعَاجِزِينَ أُولَٰئِكَ فِي الْعَذَابِ مُحْضَرُونَ⁴⁰ (٣٨)

This is a mention of the fate of those who used their abundance in wealth and children as a means to reject the revelations of God and to harass His Messenger. The verse states that these people will be seized and dragged to the punishment of God so that they bear the punishment of their arrogance. The word *مُحْضَرُونَ* depicts their state of humiliation and helplessness.

قُلْ إِنَّ رَبِّي يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَن يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ وَيَقْدِرُ لَهُ وَمَا أَنْفَقْتُمْ مِّن شَيْءٍ فَهُوَ يُخْلِفُهُ وَهُوَ خَيْرُ الرَّازِقِينَ⁴¹ (٣٩)

The opening words of this verse and those of verse 36 are exactly the same yet their connotation at both places is different. Verse 36 explains that the abundance in sustenance and their scarcity is totally in the hands of God. Hence no one should show arrogance on their abundance nor despair at their scarcity. Each person should try to understand that both these circumstances befall him as per God's wisdom. Through both types of circumstances, He tests the gratitude or patience of His people. In the verse under discussion, the Prophet (sws) is told that he should inform these affluent people that instead of showing arrogance on the blessings and sustenance of God, they should spend them on things which please God and they should rest assured that whatever they spend in the way of God will not go waste; in fact, they will be rewarded for the smallest of amounts they spend in his way. Earlier, the principle of multiple reward *فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ* (جزاء الضعف) has been stated and also explained. The words

means something whose multiplicity is not confined. (Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘arab*, vol. 9, 205)

40. And those who strive to refute Our revelations to cause harm are the ones who will be cast into the torment.

41. Say: "It is my Lord Who gives abundantly to whom He will and sparingly to him [if He pleases] and whatever you spend in charity, He will reward you for it and He is the best of providers."

are suppressed after وَمَا أَنْفَقْتُمْ because of contextual indications. The expression رَدَّ عَلَيْكَ اللَّهُ (God returned to you what you had lost.)

The expression وَهُوَ خَيْرُ الرَّازِقِينَ implies that those who spend in God should rest assured that God is the best provider. Today they cannot even imagine the great recompense they can and will receive tomorrow for the trivial things they may spend in the way of God. The word خَيْرُ (better) here is not meant to express comparison with something. It merely expresses an attribute. This style has been explained at an appropriate place in this exegesis.

Section V: Verses (40-45)

In the succeeding verses, the affluent are warned on regarding the angels to be deities and worshipping them thinking that they will save them if ever the Hereafter comes. The fact of the matter is that the angels will declare their acquittal from them and that no one will be able to save them; it is a great favour of God to them that He sent them a messenger to inform them but it is their misfortune that they are regarding his words to be sorcery; it is better if they learn a lesson from the previous nations. These nations were much more powerful than them but when God seized them no one was able to give them refuge.

Readers may now proceed to study the verses.

وَيَوْمَ يَحْشُرُهُمْ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ يَقُولُ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ أَهَؤُلَاءِ إِيَّاكُمْ كَانُوا يَعْبُدُونَ (٤٠) قَالُوا سُبْحَانَكَ أَنْتَ وَلِيِّنَا مِنْ دُونِهِمْ بَلْ كَانُوا يَعْبُدُونَ الْجِنَّ أَكْثَرُهُمْ بِهِمْ مُؤْمِنُونَ (٤١) قَالِيَوْمَ لَا يَمْلِكُ بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ نَفْعًا وَلَا ضَرًّا وَنَقُولُ لِلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا ذُوقُوا عَذَابَ النَّارِ الَّتِي كُنْتُمْ بِهَا تُكَذِّبُونَ (٤٢) وَإِذَا تَتْلَى عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُنَا بَيِّنَاتٍ قَالُوا مَا هَذَا إِلَّا رَجُلٌ يُرِيدُ أَنْ يَصُدَّكُمْ عَمَّا كَانُوا يَعْبُدُ آبَاءَكُمْ وَقَالُوا مَا هَذَا إِلَّا إِفْكٌ مُفْتَرَى وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِلْحَقِّ لَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ إِنَّ هَذَا إِلَّا سِحْرٌ مُبِينٌ (٤٣) وَمَا آتَيْنَاهُمْ مِنْ كُتُبٍ يَدْرُسُونَهَا وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْهِمْ قَبْلَكَ مِنْ نَذِيرٍ (٤٤) وَكَذَّبَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ وَمَا بَلَّغُوا مِعْشَارَ مَا آتَيْنَاهُمْ فَكَذَّبُوا رُسُلِي فَكَيْفَ كَانَ نَكِيرِ (٤٥)

And remember the day when He gathers them all together. Then He will say to the angels: "Was it you that these people worshipped?" They will reply: "Glory be to You! You are our defender against them! In fact,

they have been worshipping the jinn. Their majority believes in them alone.” (40-41)

Thus today none of you will be able to either benefit or inflict loss on one another. And We will say to these wrongdoers: “Taste now the torment of this Hell, which you continued to deny.” (42)

And when Our clear revelations are recited to them, they say: “This is but a person who wants to turn you away from the gods your fathers worshipped.” And they said: “This is nothing but an invented falsehood.” And these disbelievers said about the truth when it came to them: “This is but plain sorcery.” And We had not given them scriptures to read, nor have We sent before you anyone to inform them. (44)

And those before them also denied and they could not attain the slightest of what We gave them. So, they denied My messengers; then see how terrible was My curse on them! (45)

Explanation

وَيَوْمَ يَحْشُرُهُمْ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ يَقُولُ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ أَهَؤُلَاءِ إِيَّاكُمْ كَانُوا يَعْبُدُونَ (٤٠)⁴²

The emphasis added by the word *جَمِيعًا* is meant to convey the fact that on the Day of Judgement the disbelievers and idolaters will be gathered together with those who they worshipped or ascribed religious innovations to so that the latter could bear witness against them. The testimony of the prophets of God has already been mentioned in Sūrah Anbiyā'. It is stated there that in the presence of God they will declare their acquittal from all religious innovations their followers had invented. Similarly, the Almighty would gather the angels and inquire from them after pointing to the Idolaters of Arabia whether the claim of these Idolaters to worship them is true. Obviously, this question would be posed to conclusively convey the truth to the Idolaters: those who worshipped were not even aware of this worship; neither did they demand this worship nor were they prepared to tolerate for even a moment that anyone worships them by making them partners of God.

قَالُوا سُبْحَانَكَ أَنْتَ وَلِيِّنَا مِنْ دُونِهِمْ بَلْ كَانُوا يَعْبُدُونَ الْجِنَّ أَكْثَرُهُمْ مُؤْمِنُونَ (٤١)⁴³

The angels will immediately reply that exalted is God for others to associate partners with Him.

42. And remember the day when He gathers them all together. He will say to the angels: “Was it you that these people worshipped?”

43. They will reply: “Glory be to You! You are our defender against them! In fact, they have been worshipping the jinn. Their majority believes in them alone.”

One thing that is evident from this answer of the angels is that polytheism is such a heinous thing that they will express their hate for it as soon as they hear it and express that God is far loftier than polytheism to be ascribed to them.

The second thing which is evident from their words is that they will regard it to be a vicious allegation on them that some wrongdoers have tried to implicate them in the filth of polytheism.

The third thing which is evident from their words is that the foolish people who have made such allegations are solely responsible for them; angels are far above asking someone to worship them.

The words أَنْتَ وَلِيُّنَا مِنْ دُونِهِم of the angels solicit God's help: He is their Lord, helper and protector contrary to these wrongdoers who had tried to incriminate them with this sin. This will be a renunciation on their part and prayer to God to absolve them of this blame. The words مِنْ دُونِهِم here connote "in opposition."

The words بَلْ كَانُوا يَعْبُدُونَ الْجِنَّ أَكْثَرُهُمْ بِهِمْ مُؤْمِنُونَ uttered by the angels imply that the claim of the people that they had been worshipping them is totally baseless; yet what is true is that they have in fact been worshipping the jinn. Hence, their majority has professed faith in the jinn.

This answer given by the angels will be totally true. This is because the idols of angels – Lāt, Manāt and 'Uzzā etc – made by them were hypothetical. Such deities never existed. However, through their soothsayers, they remained in contact with the jinn, and since they regarded the jinn to be a means of acquiring the news of the unseen world, they would make offerings and sacrifices for them and also extol them. The words أَكْثَرُهُمْ بِهِمْ مُؤْمِنُونَ refer to the fact that these people profess faith in the jinn that they will bring to them the news of the unseen world and are able to benefit or harm people of their own accord.

فَالْيَوْمَ لَا يَمْلِكُ بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ نَفْعًا وَلَا ضَرًّا وَتَقُولُ لِلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا ذُوقُوا عَذَابَ النَّارِ
الَّتِي كُنْتُمْ بِهَا تُكَذِّبُونَ⁴⁴ (٤٢)

After this answer by the angels, their worshippers will be told that they have openly heard the testimony of the angels they heavily banked upon. So, today no one will be able to be of any benefit to others. Hence, neither will these angels be able to harm or benefit them nor will these worshippers be able to reciprocate this.

44. Thus today none of you will be able to either benefit or inflict loss on one another. And We will say to these wrongdoers: "Taste now the torment of this Hell, which you continued to deny."

The words الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا refer to the polytheists who had associated partners with God without any reason to support this claim and in this way had committed a great wrong (ẓulmun 'aẓīmun), and when the messenger of God warned them of God's scourge, they rejected it with utter stubbornness. It is after this conclusive communication of the truth will God tell them to taste the scourge which they had been denying.

وَإِذَا تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُنَا بَيِّنَاتٍ قَالُوا مَا هَذَا إِلَّا رَجُلٌ يُرِيدُ أَنْ يَصُدَّكُمْ عَمَّا كَانَ يَعْبُدُ آبَاؤُكُمْ وَقَالُوا مَا هَذَا إِلَّا إِفْكٌ مُّفْتَرًى وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِلْحَقِّ لَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ إِنَّ هَذَا إِلَّا سِحْرٌ مُّبِينٌ (٤٣)⁴⁵

This verse expresses amazement on the obduracy and arrogance of these people and also expresses sorrow on their misfortune and deprivation. They are trying to besmear the sun. When God's revelations which are lucid and sound and which radiate both the heart and intellect are recited before them, they try to mislead their masses against them by saying that this person wants to lead them away from their deities worshipped by all their forefathers. Reference to forefathers has always remained a potent means in the hands of the miscreants to incite the masses against facts. In fact, it would not be wrong to say that this is perhaps the sole argument which the misguided have always presented in their favour. The statement مَا هَذَا إِلَّا رَجُلٌ also reflects their venom. They try to convince their masses they should not be lured by this person (ie Muḥammad (sws)) who is presenting himself as God's messenger. He is an ordinary human being who has falsely posed himself as God's envoy so that he can lead them away from their ancestral religion.

The words وَقَالُوا مَا هَذَا إِلَّا إِفْكٌ مُّفْتَرًى reflect their propaganda against the Qur'ān. They try to convince their masses that it is falsely claimed that the Qur'ān has been revealed by God; this false claim has been made to over-awe them. The fact is that it is merely a self-concocted book that has been falsely ascribed to God.

The words وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِلْحَقِّ لَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ express amazement at their nonsensical talk that these people are dilly dallying after the truth has become apparent to them. If the sun has disappeared from the horizon

45. And when Our clear revelations are recited to them, they say: "This is but a person who wants to turn you away from the gods your fathers worshipped." And they said: "This is nothing but an invented falsehood." And these disbelievers said about the truth when it came to them: "This is but plain sorcery."

and an obdurate person asks about it, then this obduracy is not a cause of amazement; however, when the sun is shining at midday and someone regards this to be magic, then this can only be attributed to his intellectual depravity.

The word *حَقَّقَ* in *لِلْحَقِّ* connotes the Qur'ān and the letter *ل* connotes *في*. This use is very common in Arabic. Examples can be seen in the previous *sūrahs*.

The words *إِنْ هَذَا إِلَّا سِحْرٌ مُّبِينٌ* provide the details of their statement that they would regard this Qur'ān to be magic. It has already been explained at an appropriate place of this exegesis what they meant by regarding the Qur'ān to be magic: the staunchest of its opponents acknowledged the eloquence and potency of the Qur'ān, but they tried to convince the masses that this eloquence and potency related to the magical style of its presenter; it is not divine in nature.

وَمَا آتَيْنَاهُمْ مِّنْ كُتُبٍ يَدْرُسُونَهَا وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْهِمْ قَبْلَكَ مِن نَّذِيرٍ (٤٤)⁴⁶

This verse expresses favour to the opponents and sorrow at their attitude of not giving due regard to this favour. Before this, neither did the Almighty give them any book which could have guided and instructed them nor prior to Muḥammad (sws) did ever a prophet came to them who could have awoken them from their slumber. Hence, it was only befitting that they should have given due importance to this great favour of God and welcomed it; they could have been well-guided by it in the affairs of this world and also earned the kingdom of the next world. Yet they are opposing it and inviting the wrath of God. As per the established practice of God, His wrath necessarily visits the nation which denies His messenger.

The attribute *يَدْرُسُونَهَا* which qualifies the word *كُتُبٍ* points to the fact that till then, these people had not been given divine scriptures like the Israelites so that they could have read and taught them. The guidance given to them through Abraham (sws) was in the form of an oral tradition which was almost forgotten with the passage of time, and a plethora of religious innovations had badly distorted their religion. It was God's intention that by giving them His Book He complete His favour on them. However, it is a pity that these people are regarding it to be magic and fabrication.

46. And We had not given them scriptures to read, nor have We sent before you anyone to inform them.

وَكَذَّبَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ وَمَا بَلَغُوا مِعْشَارَ مَا آتَيْنَاهُمْ فَكَذَّبُوا رُسُلِي فَكَيْفَ كَانَ نَكِيرِ (٤٥)⁴⁷

This verse sounds a warning to these people: the necessary consequence of denying the messenger and warner of God is that such people are destroyed. The whole annals of mankind bear witness to this established practice of God.

The words وَمَا بَلَغُوا مِعْشَارَ مَا آتَيْنَاهُمْ are an apt warning inserted in the discourse: those nations are being referred to who were far mightier and majestic than the Quraysh; however, when they denied the messenger of God, the manner in which the curse of God manifested on them is mentioned at many instances in the Qur'ān. The implication is that if their resources and affluence have made them arrogant, then this has no basis. Just one blow of God was enough to wipe out powerful and mighty nations. So what good are the Quraysh. They are far below in power and might. It is because of their mean nature that they have gone astray even with their meager resources.

Section VI: Verses: (46-54)

Coming up are the closing verses of the *sūrah* in which the addressees are very affectionately advised and counseled and also strongly threatened at the same time to mend their ways. If this time passes, it will not come again. At that time, they will regret this; but this will be of no avail. Readers may now proceed to study the verses.

قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَعْظَمُكُمْ بِوَاحِدَةٍ أَنْ تَقُومُوا لِلَّهِ مِثْلَ خِزْفٍ ثُمَّ تَذَرُونَ مَا بِصَاحِبِكُمْ مِنْ حِجَّةٍ أَنْ هُوَ إِلَّا نَذِيرٌ لَكُمْ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ عَذَابٍ شَدِيدٍ (٤٦) قُلْ مَا سَأَلْتُكُمْ مِنْ أَجْرٍ فَهُوَ لَكُمْ إِنْ أَجْرِيَ إِلَّا عَلَى اللَّهِ وَهُوَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ (٤٧) قُلْ إِنَّ رَبِّي يَقْذِفُ بِالْحَقِّ عَلاَمُ الْغُيُوبِ (٤٨) قُلْ جَاءَ الْحَقُّ وَمَا يُبْدِيُ الْبَاطِلُ وَمَا يُعِيدُ (٤٩) قُلْ إِنْ صَلَّيْتُ فَقَدْ أَضَلُّ عَلَى نَفْسِي وَإِنْ اهْتَدَيْتُ فَبِمَا يُوحِي إِلَيَّ رَبِّي إِنَّهُ سَمِيعٌ قَرِيبٌ (٥٠) وَلَوْ تَرَى إِذْ فَرَغُوا فَلَا قُوَّةَ وَأُخِذُوا مِنْ مَكَانٍ قَرِيبٍ (٥١) وَقَالُوا آمَنَّا بِهِ وَأَنَّى لَهُمُ التَّنَازُؤُ مِنْ مَكَانٍ بَعِيدٍ (٥٢) وَقَدْ كَفَرُوا بِهِ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَيَقْذِفُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ مِنْ مَكَانٍ بَعِيدٍ (٥٣) وَحِيلَ بَيْنَهُمْ

47. And those before them also denied and they could not attain the slightest of what We gave them. So, they denied My messengers; then see how terrible was My curse on them!

وَيَبِّنْ مَا يَشْتَهُونَ كَمَا فُعِلَ بِأَشْيَاعِهِمْ مِّن قَبْلُ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا فِي شَكٍّ مَُّرِيبٍ (٥٤)

Tell them: "I counsel you about one thing: stand up in pairs or singly for the sake of God; then reflect. Your companion is not one possessed. He is only a warner of a stern punishment." Say: "If I have asked for any reward from you, it is for you only. My reward rests with God alone. And He is ever-watching everything." (46-47)

Say: "My Lord will strike truth [on falsehood]. He fully knows all the secrets. Say: "Truth has come. Falsehood neither begins nor returns." (48-49)

Say: "If I am in error, then I alone shall bear its evil consequences, and if I am rightly guided, then this is because of the revelation my Lord is sending to me. He hears all and is near at hand." (50)

And if you could only see them when they will be overcome by anxiety. Thus, they will not be able to run away and shall be caught from nearby. And they will say: "We profess faith in it." But how can they acquire it from far away. And before this, they rejected it, and indulged in conjecture from far away, and a wall will distance them from their desires just as the case was with those similar to them earlier. Indeed, they had been inflicted with a perplexing doubt. (51-54)

Explanation

قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَعْظَمُكُمْ بِوَاحِدَةٍ أَنْ تَقُومُوا لِلَّهِ مَثْنَىٰ وَفُرَادَىٰ ثُمَّ تَتَفَكَّرُوا مَا بِصَاحِبِكُمْ مِّن جِنَّةٍ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا نَذِيرٌ لَّكُمْ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ عَذَابٍ شَدِيدٍ (٤٦)⁴⁸

It is mentioned in verse 7-8 earlier that when the Prophet (sws) would threaten the arrogant people of his nation of worldly and next-worldly punishment, they would regard him to be a person possessed. They would say that this person is inflicted with hallucinations of punishment everywhere. The Prophet (sws) is told to answer this objection by earnestly asking them to follow an advice. The advice is that while shunning stubbornness, bias and conceit they should stand up in pairs or singly and seriously listen to his message and reflect on it. The word **لِلَّهِ** is meant to point out to them that till that time they have been guided by their evil desires and Satan and hence they could deliberate on the matter in an unbiased way. However, God has the greatest right on a person, and they too believe in God. So for the sake of God they should stand up afresh to reflect on the actual reality while rising above all vested

48. Tell them: "I counsel you about one thing: stand up in pairs or single for the sake of God; then reflect. Your companion is not one possessed. He is only a warner of a stern punishment."

interests. "Stand up" here refers turning towards God and striving for Him. Though this request will weigh heavily on them in this atmosphere of vested interests but for the sake of God they should tolerate it. This is the right attitude.

The words *وَفَرَادَىٰ مَثْنَىٰ* direct attention to the fact that mobs are not capable of thinking. Till then, their attitude has been that as soon as the Prophet (sws) would utter anything the miscreants among them would launch a propaganda against him so that no one is able to listen and understand what he has to say. They should now give up this attitude and now come to him singly or in pairs and intently listen to what he has to say to them. They should reflect on what he has to say and discuss their doubts with him and seek their answers from him and then reflect if what he is saying are the words of a person possessed or these words actually portray the fate they shall necessarily meet.

The words *مَا بِصَاحِبِكُمْ مِّنْ جِنَّةٍ* imply that if they seriously reflect, it will become evident that their companion is not inflicted with madness; the fact is that their own intellects are covered with bias and they are trying to harass him by rallying against him in multitudes.

The word *صَاحِبٍ* refers to the fact that the person they regard as mad and one possessed is not someone new to them: he is someone born and raised among them before their very eyes. In all this time, they saw that he was part of all their virtuous acts and abstained from all their vices. They found him to be *ṣādiq* (truthful) and *amīn* (trustworthy) in every trial and test. They really trusted his insight and wisdom and regarded him to be someone very prudent; but today they are regarding this prudent person as one possessed. They should reflect whether he is possessed or are they possessed.

There is a short pause after *تَتَفَكَّرُوا* and this pause is very subtle. It is as if after inviting people to reflect they are also given some time for it. After that, the conclusion they should reach after reflection is put forth before them. Several examples of such pauses are found in the Qur'ān.

The words *إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا نَذِيرٌ لَّكُمْ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ عَذَابٍ شَدِيدٍ* are very apt. The implication is that they do witness that only one thought and idea infatuate dominates his call and he continues to remind and warn them of this worldly and next worldly punishment at every instant. Moreover, in spite of all their opposition, harassments and oppression, he continues to come to them, then this anxiety of his is not because he is insane. The real reason is that he is seeing with his eyes the punishment which is looming over their heads yet they are not being able to see it. His worry and anxiety springs from his sympathy for them; however, because of their blind frenzy they regard his anxiety to be madness and lunacy.

Here it may be kept in mind that it is not in metaphorical terms that a messenger of God sees the punishment looming over his nation; it is an absolute reality. A messenger is like a cloud of mercy for his nation yet concealed in this cloud is the thunder of punishment as well if his nation rejects him. This worldly punishment is a prelude to the punishment of the Hereafter. For this reason, each messenger has warned his nation of both these punishments and warned them with such conviction as if he is seeing these punishments from his very eyes. Yet people devoid of insight regarded this conviction to be lunacy. The proclamation of *wa ṣabāḥā* made by the Prophet (sws) at the Ṣafā' hill was a manifestation of this very conviction. However, the leaders of the Quraysh instead of paying heed to it made fun of it.

قُلْ مَا سَأَلْتُكُمْ مِّنْ أَجْرٍ فَهُوَ لَكُمْ إِنَّ أَجْرِيَ إِلَّا عَلَى اللَّهِ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ (٤٧)

What is mentioned in the above verse is discussed in the Qur'ān in two ways; yet both have the same purport.

One of them is that the Prophet (sws) it to convey to his addressees that he has not asked any reward of his service so that they are shying away from him as this rests with God alone.

The other one is that the Prophet (sws) is told to communicate to his addressees that if he has requested them to something which they regard to be remuneration and are burdened by it, then this is not for his own self but for their own benefit – both in this world and in the next.

There are several verses which state the first of the above purports. References are not needed. Here, in the verse under discussion, the second of the above purports is implied. Here are a few parallel verses. It is said in Sūrah Furqān:

قُلْ مَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ أَجْرٍ إِلَّا مَن شَاءَ أَن يَتَّخِذَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِ سَبِيلًا (٢٥: ٥٧)

Say: "I have not demanded any reward from you except that whoever wants should adopt the path of His Lord." (25:57)

Though the above verse can be interpreted in the first of the above purports above and this would not be linguistically incorrect as well, yet also evident is the purport that the Prophet (sws) is asked to tell his addressees that he has not desired from them any remuneration for his service. If he has desired anything, it is for them and that is he would like to show the straight path to whoever among them wants to tread the path

49. Say: "If I have asked for any reward from you, it is for you only. My reward rests with God alone. And He is ever-watching everything."

that leads to God.

Similarly, it is stated in Sūrah Shūrā:

قُلْ لَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا إِلَّا الْمَوَدَّةَ فِي الْقُرْبَىٰ (٤٢: ٢٣)

Say: "For this I demand of you no recompense except that be kind to your kin." (42:23)

Though the above verse can be interpreted in the first of the above two purports and we will discuss it in its exegesis, yet the second of the purports is also evident from it. Interpreted thus, it would mean that if the Prophet's addressees regard his invitation to spend in the cause of God and to honour familial ties to be a burden, then he is not doing this for his own self but for them and their relatives and kin.

In this very purport, it is said in the verse under discussion that the Prophet (sws) in the first place has not asked his addressees for any remuneration for his preaching; his reward and remuneration rest with God. However, if they consider any of his demands a burden and regard them as his reward, then this is merely their misconception and wrong understanding. Whatever he has asked from them is for them alone and not for his own self. If he warns them of fearing God and paying heed to the Day of Judgement, urges them to do virtuous deeds, spend in the way of God, feed the orphans and the needy, liberate slaves – then none of these things is of any personal benefit to him. The fact of the matter is that both their individual and collective benefit is for them. If they follow these things, they will succeed both in this world and in the next.

Wherever the above statement is given by the Qur'ān, it is meant to rebuke the addressees and to show aversion to them. The implication is that the Prophet (sws) should convey to his addressees who are not giving due importance to his message that he after all has not asked for a ticket or financial support that may be a source of stopping them from coming to him and hearing his message; they can come to him anytime and without any hesitation; there is no restriction on anyone to come to him; his door is open for one and all – whether rich or poor all are warmly welcome. If they do not come, then they should remember that this will harm him the least; they will however harm themselves. It is not that the Prophet (sws) will suffer any loss if they do not come. What he has obtained from God free of cost, he wants to give to others without charging them.

The words *وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ* imply that the God Who has taken the responsibility of the Prophet's reward is watching over everything; he is quite sure that the smallest of his services will be in God's notice. He is

observing the Prophet's efforts and the ill-ways of his opponents. The Prophet (sws) fully trusts God in rewarding him for his efforts.

قُلْ إِنَّ رَبِّي يَقْذِفُ بِالْحَقِّ عَلَـٰمُ الْغُيُوبِ (٤٨)⁵⁰

It is contextually evident that the words عَلَى الْبَاطِل are suppressed after يَقْذِفُ بِالْحَقِّ. This is evident from a parallel verse: (١٨ : ٢١) عَلَى يَقْذِفُ بِالْحَقِّ. (We will smack falsehood with the truth and it will crush out its brain, (21:18))

The verse directs the Prophet (sws) to tell these naïve people that they should not remain in the misconception that this world has been created without a purpose and that it will end without a purpose; a day shall necessarily come when its Creator will pass His verdict between the truth and falsehood that are found in it; He will strike falsehood with the truth crush it to pieces. It may be kept in mind that what is said here primarily relates to the greater court of judgement that will be set up in the Hereafter; however, the same is true for the lesser court of judgement that is set up in this world in the times of God's messengers. It has been explained at many instances in this exegesis that the fate of nations to whom messengers of God are sent are necessarily decided in this world. Consequently, on the day Makkah was conquered, he proclaimed: جَاءَ الْحَقُّ (the truth has arrived and falsehood has been destroyed; indeed, falsehood is meant destined for destruction, (17:81)).

The expression عَلَـٰمُ الْغُيُوبِ in my opinion is a complete sentence and its inchoative (*mubtadā'*) is suppressed here. It actually affords an argument from the attributes of God in favour of the court of justice that will be decided between truth and falsehood: the Lord of this universe knows everything found in it; nothing is hidden from His eyes. Hence no one should remain in the misconception that the Creator will have any difficulty in deciding matters. He will present each person with his account of deeds. Found in it will be every deed he did however hidden it may have been.

قُلْ جَاءَ الْحَقُّ وَمَا يُبْدِئُ الْبَاطِلُ وَمَا يُعِيدُ (٤٩)⁵¹

Just as in the above verse the words عَلَى الْبَاطِل are suppressed after يَقْذِفُ, here the words زَهَقَ الْبَاطِلُ are suppressed after جَاءَ الْحَقُّ. This

50. Say: "My Lord will strike truth [on falsehood]. He fully knows all the secrets.

51. Say: "Truth has come. Falsehood neither begins nor returns."

suppression is indicated by the words وَمَا يُبْدِئُ الْبَاطِلَ وَمَا يُعِيدُ.

The verse directs the Prophet (sws) to tell his naïve addressees that since the truth has now come to them in the form of the Qur'ān, its arrival has signaled the destruction of falsehood they have been worshipping. If they still continue to cling to it, they too will be ruined.

The words وَمَا يُبْدِئُ الْبَاطِلَ وَمَا يُعِيدُ point to the transient nature of falsehood: This world was initiated by its Creator on the truth; hence it is essential that it end on the truth as well. When falsehood had no role in its initiation how can it have any role in its culmination? Hence people who are spending their lives while relying on their hypothetical deities should bear in mind that their deities neither have any authority in initiating a thing nor making it reach its end. It needs to be kept in mind that the idolaters of Arabia would not associate anyone in the creation of this universe; however, they believed that if ever the Hereafter comes, then they shall return to their deities who they worshipped. These deities through intercession before God will win for them a high status there. The Qur'ān has refuted this misconception of theirs at various instances. It asks them that when they do not regard anyone to be God's partner when He started creation and created this universe, why do ascribe partners to Him when He will re-create?

In Sūrah Yūnus, this subject is discussed thus:

إِلَيْهِ مَرْجِعُكُمْ جَمِيعًا وَعَدَ اللَّهُ حَقًّا إِنَّهُ يَبْدَأُ الْخَلْقَ ثُمَّ يُعِيدُهُ لِيَجْزِيَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ بِالْقِسْطِ وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَهُمْ شَرَابٌ مِّنْ حَمِيمٍ وَعَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْفُرُونَ (١٠: ٤)

Towards Him shall all of you return. This promise of God is bound to be fulfilled. Indeed, it is He Who begins creation and it is He Who will create again so that He may recompense with fairness those who accepted faith and did righteous deeds. (10:4)

Then what is stated above is re-iterated in the following words:

قُلْ هَلْ مِنْ شُرَكَائِكُمْ مَّنْ يَبْدَأُ الْخَلْقَ ثُمَّ يُعِيدُهُ قُلِ اللَّهُ يَبْدَأُ الْخَلْقَ ثُمَّ يُعِيدُهُ فَأَنَّى تُؤْفَكُونَ (١٠: ٣٤)

Ask them: "Is there anyone of your deities who begins creation and then will re-create? So how are you deluded away?" (10:34)

قُلْ إِنْ صَلَّيْتُ فَإِنَّمَا أَضِلُّ عَلَى نَفْسِي وَإِنْ اهْتَدَيْتُ فَبِمَا يُوحِي إِلَيَّ رَبِّي إِنَّهُ سَمِيعٌ قَرِيبٌ (٥٠)⁵²

This verse warns these people through the tongue of the Prophet (sws). He should tell them that if he has been led astray as they think, then only he only will bear the consequences and they will remain safe because they are not supporting his stance. However, there is another aspect on which they must deeply reflect: if the Prophet (sws) is rightly guided, then this guidance has been acquired from the revelations which God is sending to him; in this case, denying him should not be an ordinary thing; they will be regarded someone who have denied God's revelations and the fate that such people meet and will meet is no ordinary a matter. The implication is that they should fully contemplate the consequences of this denial.

The words إِنَّهُ سَمِيعٌ قَرِيبٌ reflect trust in God. In other words, arguing any more with these people is fruitless. The Prophet (sws) has told them that these are the last words which he will convey to them after which he will consign his matter to God. They are neither prepared to listen to what he says nor ready to come near him; yet his Lord listens to him and is also near him. So instead of wasting time with them, he would rather earnestly converse with God who hears and listens.

وَلَوْ تَرَىٰ إِذْ فَرَغُوا فَلَا قُوَّةَ وَأُخِذُوا مِنْ مَّكَانٍ قَرِيبٍ (٥١)⁵³

The answer to the conditional clause is suppressed. A similar suppression occurred in verse 31 earlier. The reason for such a suppression is that the answer is beyond expression in words. The implication is that today such is the extent of their arrogance that they are totally unruffled, yet if people could see them when they will be seized by the God's grip they are denying today, they will have some idea of their helplessness: they will show total submission and acknowledge the truth at that time. The verse goes on to state that when these people would be seized by God, they will worriedly try escape from it; yet who has ever been able to save himself from God's grasp? The words وَأُخِذُوا مِنْ مَّكَانٍ قَرِيبٍ say that they will try to run away but will be caught from nearby. In such a manner will God's torment seize them

52. Say: "If I am in error, then I alone shall bear its evil consequences, and if I am rightly guided, then this is because of the revelation my Lord is sending to me. He hears all and is near at hand."

53. And if you could only see the disbelievers when they will be overcome by anxiety. Thus, they will not be able to run away and shall be caught from nearby.

from above their heads or below their feet that they will not be able to run any where.

وَقَالُوا آمَنَّا بِهِ وَأَنَّى لَهُمُ التَّنَاقُشُ مِنْ مَّكَانٍ بَعِيدٍ (٥٢)⁵⁴

The verse implies that at that time they will come out of their state of inebriation and realize what the reality is and they will proclaim faith in the Book of God. The antecedent of the pronoun in *به* is the Qur'ān which has been mentioned in earlier verses. Belief in the Prophet who has presented the Qur'ān is automatically implied.

The words *وَأَنَّى لَهُمُ التَّنَاقُشُ مِنْ مَّكَانٍ بَعِيدٍ* imply that the time to accept faith was this world and that too before God's torment visits a people. When God's torment arrives, they will be so far away from their destination of accepting faith that there will be no chance left for them to reach it. Upon seeing God's torment, a person as arrogant as the Pharaoh had expressed his intention to profess faith in the Lord of Moses (sws) and Aaron (sws). Yet the answer that he received from God was: *وَقَدْ* *الآنَ وَقَدْ* *عَصَيْتَ قَبْلُ* (٩١: ١٠) (It is now that you have professed faith; yet when you had the time to accept faith, you showed disobedience, (10: 91))

The word *التَّنَاقُشُ* means to attain or acquire something and the expression *أَنَّى لَهُمُ* imply: "what chance is left to acquire it at that time."

دست کوتاه است و خرما بر نخیل

(My hands are short and dates are [high up] on the palm-tree)

وَقَدْ كَفَرُوا بِهِ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَيَقْذِفُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ مِنْ مَّكَانٍ بَعِيدٍ (٥٣)⁵⁵

The expression *قذف بالحجارة* means "to throw stones," and *قذف بالقول* means to say something without thinking. It is from here that it started to mean *رجما بالغيب* ie. making a wild guess.

The implication is that they will only believe when they behold the punishment. Earlier they had rashly speculated that this Book is a fabrication; its presenter, God forbid, is an imposter, his threat of punishment is mere bluff and the warning of the Day of Judgement is a product of his insanity. They further contended that if ever the Day of Judgement comes, their deities will secure their dominance there too. In

54. And they will say: "We profess faith in it." But how can they acquire it from far away.

55. And before this, they rejected it, and indulged in conjecture from far away,

short, while disregarding sense and reason, they continued to utter nonsense in frenzy of denying the Qur'ān and His Messenger. Yet when the truth manifests itself before their eyes, they will acknowledge it. However, this acknowledgement will be too late and bear no fruit.

وَحِيلَ بَيْنَهُمْ وَبَيْنَ مَا يَشْتَهُونَ كَمَا فُعِلَ بِأَشْيَاعِهِمْ مِّن قَبْلُ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا فِي شَكٍّ مَُّرِيبٍ (٥٤)⁵⁶

The verse expresses the fact that when the decisive punishment will appear, then a wall will be erected between them and all their desires. They would like to accept faith but it will be futile. They will request for some respite but their call will not be heard. They will invoke their deities, but they too will not respond to them. In short, all doors of hope will be closed on them and they will have to face eternal despair.

The words كَمَا فُعِلَ بِأَشْيَاعِهِمْ state that these people too will meet the same fate as their likes earlier on. This refers to the people of 'Ād, the Thamūd, Madyan and the Pharaoh etc whose accounts have been related in detail in the Qur'ān. The implication is that there is nothing which has not taken place earlier. History bears witness that all nations met this very calamity who like these people denied the warnings of their respective messenger. If these people do not learn a lesson from these earlier nations, then they too will necessarily meet the same fate.

The words إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا فِي شَكٍّ مَُّرِيبٍ refer to the fact that these earlier nations too were inflicted with a similar baffling doubt until the decisive moment arrived. I have already explained the implications of شَكٍّ مَُّرِيبٍ in verse 62 of Sūrah Hūd.

By the help and grace of God, this brings us to the end of the exegesis of this sūrah. فَلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ عَلَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ (gratitude be to God for this).

Raḥmānābād

3rd January, 1975

Friday, 9 am

56. And a wall will distance them from their desires just as the case was with those similar to them earlier. Indeed, they had been inflicted with a perplexing doubt.